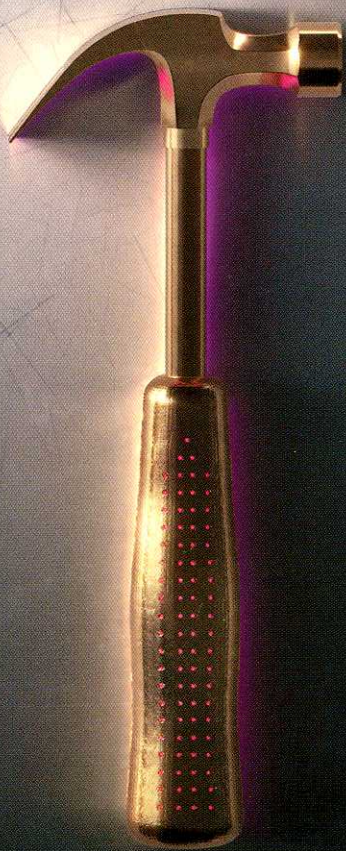




Drive

NICOLAS WINDING REFN

Drive

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SCORPION RISING

BY ALISON TAYLOR

The first visual reference I showed Ryan in regards to *Drive* was [Anger's] *Scorpio Rising*... Ryan asked, 'Why are you showing me a movie with a lot of guys working on motorcycles?' And I said, 'It's how it's shot – the sensual, sexual nature of it, the fetish, the objectification. That's what we should try to go for.'

(Refn in Witmer 2011, p.29)

Drive (2011), like so many of Refn's works, is unashamedly surface. This is not to say that the films are devoid of substance – scratch a little and we unearth a wealth of influence, allusion, and mysticism that can only enrich our appreciation. Rather, Refn's films are enjoyable on a purely superficial level because they revel in their visual and sonic opulence. With slow glide neon tableaux, mannerist shifts between naturalism and expressionism, and violent set pieces rendered exquisite by their sheer aestheticism, Refn's style seduces. His characters are archetypes, his themes both grand and immortal, his performers often opaque. In *Drive*, Refn pares back narrative and dialogue like a skeleton upon which to hang his artistry – what remains are the distilled pleasures of a B-revenge plot lacquered with the sheen of art cinema. As

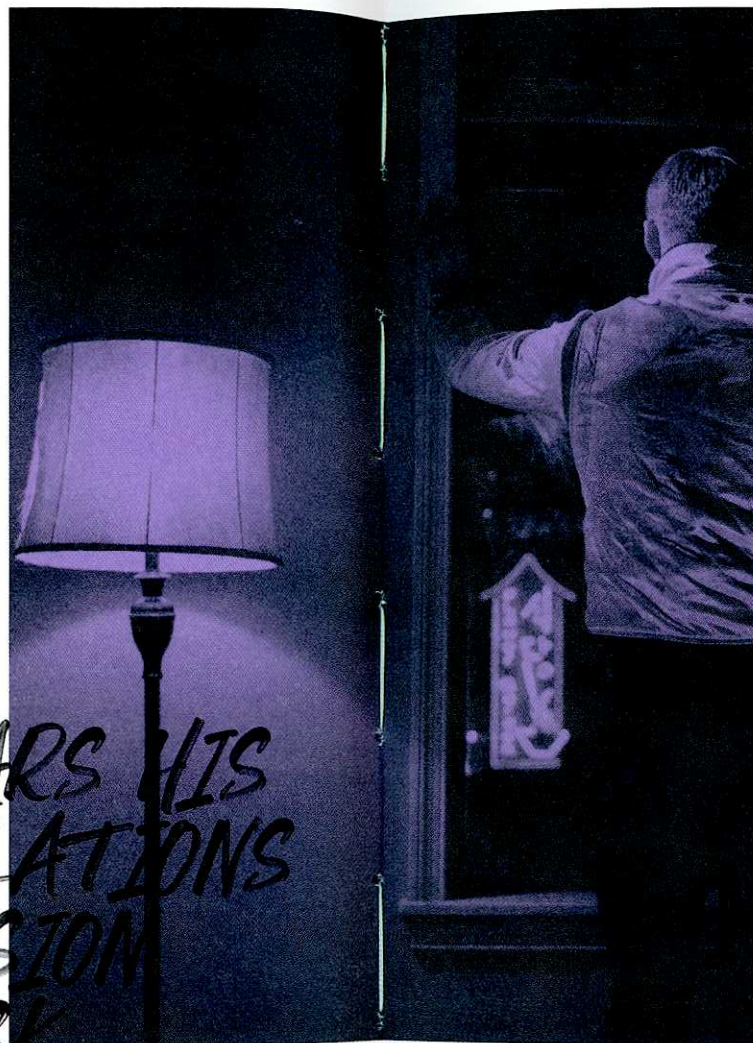


THE SENSUAL
SEXUAL NATURE
OF IT

a stand-alone piece, *Drive* is ineffably cool, an elegant if blood-spattered love letter to Los Angeles. But the film is also a transformer illuminating neon ley lines between Refn's greater oeuvre.

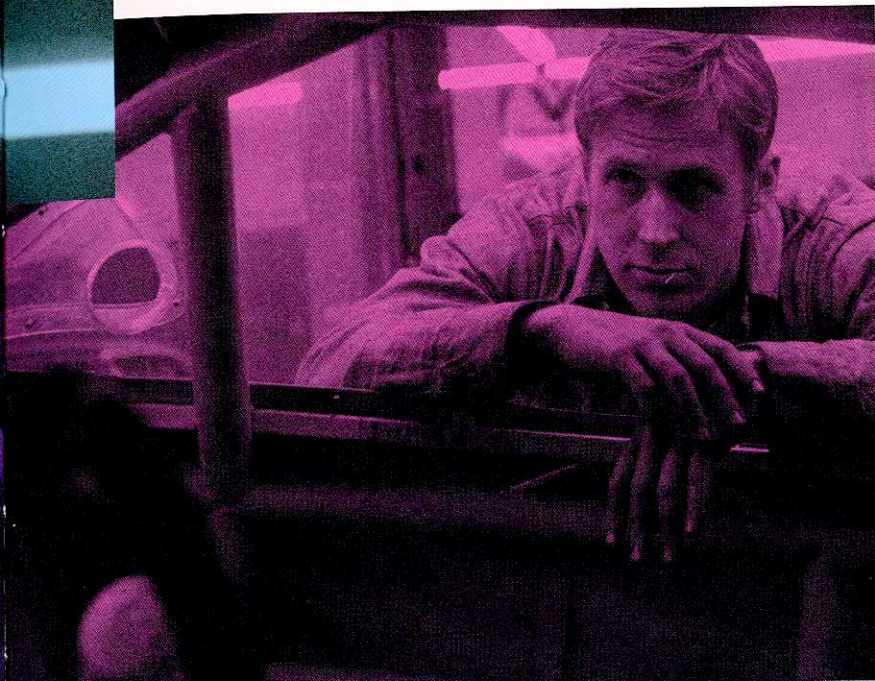
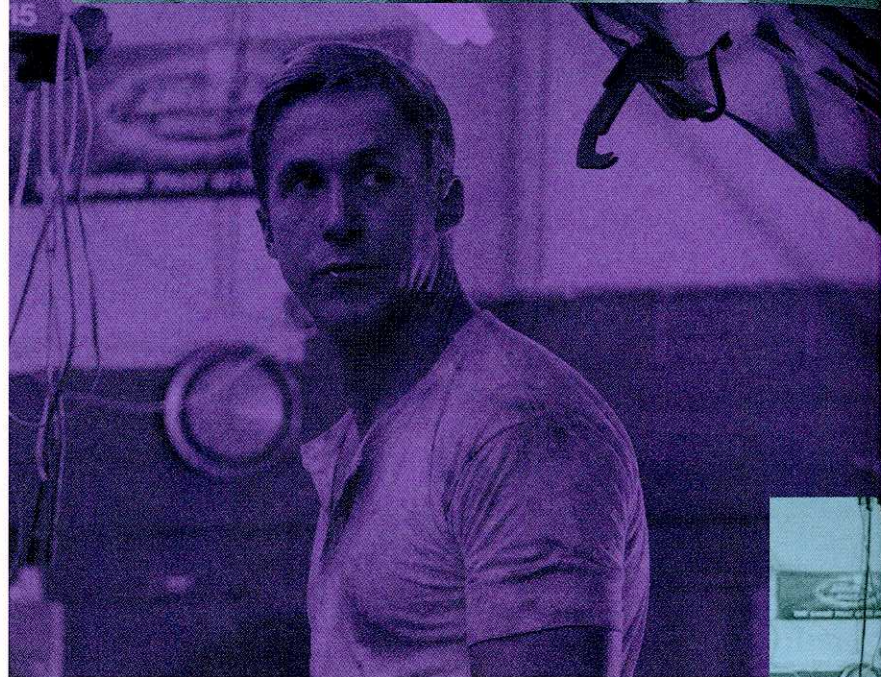
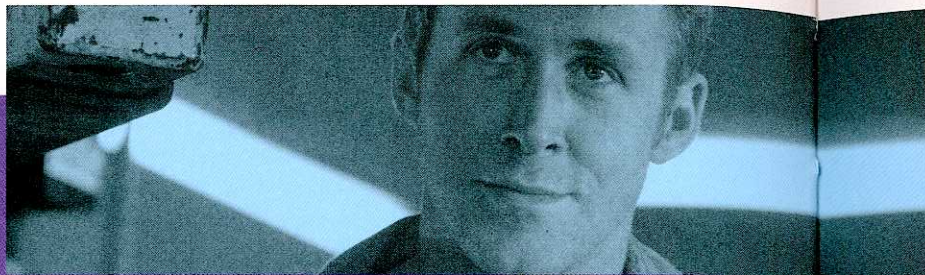
At the film's heart is Driver (Ryan Gosling) – a stoic antihero. Reminiscent of Sergio Leone's bounty hunter from the *Dollars* trilogy, Driver is a nameless arbiter of justice through bloodshed. Morally ambiguous, Driver both navigates a criminal underworld and sacrifices himself to protect innocents. Where James Sallis' source novel grants us access to Driver's interiority, as well as fragments of his past, in Refn's film

GOSLING WEARS HIS
QUIET MODULATIONS
OF EXPRESSION
LIKE A MASK



he is a cypher, enigmatic and unknowable. Presented without origin or context, Driver is elevated to mythic status; like the Western hero, he is 'both complete and incomplete, serene and growing, vulnerable and invulnerable, a man and a god' (Kitses 1970, 19). Whether or not Driver survives or succumbs to his injuries at the film's end is stylistically ambiguous, but like Ethan Edwards of Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), once Driver's task is complete, he will ride on, resolute and alone.

Stoicism, justice, moral ambiguity, and sacrifice set Driver in kinship with several Refn protagonists, as does Gosling's subdued performance. Set against the corporeal expressivity of Bryan Cranston's Shannon, or the affable malevolence of Albert Brooks's Bernie, Gosling wears his quiet modulations of expression like a mask. *Valhalla Rising's* (2009) One Eye (Mads Mikkelsen) – who also sacrifices himself for the sake of innocence – is surface personified. Stripped of dialogue altogether, One Eye shields himself from a hostile world as much by affecting an impenetrable blankness as he does by administering physical force. In



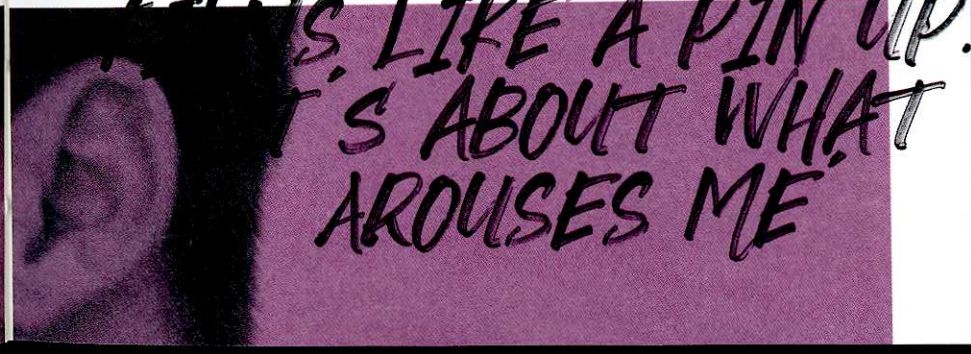
Only God Forgives (2013), Gosling retreats even further into inscrutability as Julian, another character whose criminality is not without a moral code. Following his mother's orders to avenge his murdered brother, Julian will sooner turn on his associates than permit the slaying of innocents. Where these characters are set apart from the worlds they occupy by their opacity, in *Too Old to Die Young* (2019), Refn's penchant for moral indeterminacy and impassive performance all but absorb the diegesis; key players straddle liminal space between criminality and justice while delivering speech and gesture at so freighted a pace, they might be wading through molasses.

In essence, Refn's affinity for surface is tied up with his approach to cinema as a fetishistic medium. Describing himself as a pornographer, Refn explains: 'I approach my films like a pin up. It's about what arouses me' (Moretti 2013). Textures, objects, and body parts are vested with magical charge and innate value. In *Drive* it is the sheen of an automobile, the cold sensation of a bullet pressed against a gangster's forehead, it is Driver's clenched fist pulling taut his leather gloves. Refn attributes his awakening to film's fetishistic potential

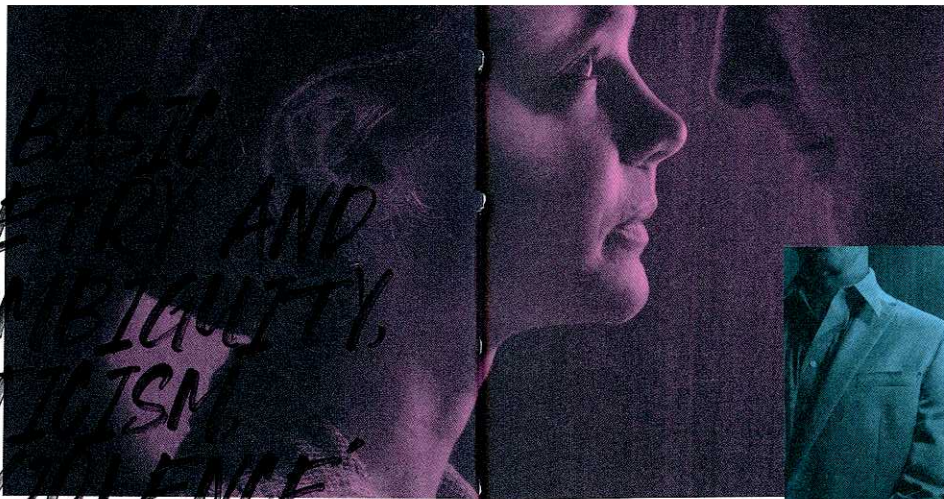
to the films of avant-garde filmmaker, Kenneth Anger (Richards 2016), and *Drive* makes its indebtedness known. The gold scorpion that emblazons Driver's ivory satin bomber jacket and the film's infatuation with pop songs pay homage to *Scorpio Rising* (1963), while the loving attention to Driver's vehicle recalls *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (1965). Discussing his subversive prison movie *Bronson* (2008), Refn explains: 'The person I stole everything from to make the movie is Kenneth Anger. [*Bronson*] is a combination of *Scorpio Rising* and *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*. It's very basic visual poetry and sexual ambiguity, homoeroticism, erotic violence' (Hartman 2009).

While *Drive* and *Bronson* demand less of their audiences than some of Refn's films in terms of their fetishistic imagery – in both, such imagery is reconcilable with the narrative action – elsewhere, it overtakes plot altogether. More interested in conjuring a sensation or mood than progressing narrative, Refn

'I APPROACH MY
FILMS LIKE A PIN UP.
IT'S ABOUT WHAT
AROUSES ME'



'IT'S VERY
VISUAL POETRY AND
SEXUAL AMBIGUITY,
HOMOEROTICISM,
EROTIC VIOLENCE'



casts his audience unanchored into the spectacle of his fixations. One might recall the camera tracing a snake's slow glide over Jesus' (Augusto Aguilera) torso under a throbbing neon light in *Too Old to Die Young*, or the sound of a steel blade being tapped against Jessie's (Elle Fanning) teeth in *The Neon Demon* (2016) as creepy motel employee Hank (Keanu Reeves) works a knife into the sleeping girl's mouth. The elliptical narrative of *Only God Forgives* is punctuated by the recurring imagery of Julian's hands, palms splayed before slowly clenching into fists. These images are not without purpose, but they are not readily legible either; if we expect an easy assimilation of such moments into conventional narrative logic, we are likely to be frustrated. It is the nature of fetish for an object to be satisfying *in itself*, and so we do better to surrender to the aesthetic gratification of Refn's predilections.

Still, there are moments in *Drive* where Refn permits style to dominate, notably with another directorial tendency to shift between naturalism and expressionism

in the service of mood. In *Drive*, Refn contrasts the harsh grit of LA's underworld and the dreamy ideal of fairy-tale romance. At one end of the spectrum are crooked pizza parlours, shady pawn shops, and subterranean strip clubs. At the other is the warmly lit pastel palette apartment block where Driver, Irene, and Benicio interact, or the sun-kissed afternoon they spend driving around and skipping stones together. Driver strives to keep these worlds separate, the one gradually encroaching upon the other before colliding irreconcilably in the famed elevator scene. When Driver realises he and Irene are sharing a lift with a hitman, Refn effects a bravura moment of style; tense silence gives way to Cliff Martinez's mournful score, the elevator lights dim, and time and reality are suspended in slow motion while hero and heroine share a tender kiss. However, as Sallis' Driver muses in the novel, 'nothing gold can stay' (2011, 111), and with startling abruptness we are crashed back into the real. The lights fade back up and a regular frame rate resumes as Driver pushes the hitman to the floor and stomps on his head repeatedly until his skull caves in.

Here, expressionism offers a fleeting portal into a romantic dream space, before a decisive moment that makes a shared past irretrievable, and a shared future impossible. In *Irene and Benicio*, Driver finds a purity worth defending, however this is not without its price. His sacrifice both absolves and condemns him, the brutality required incompatible with the unsullied world he seeks to preserve, ultimately expelling him from it.

While the stylistic grandeur of *Drive* or *Too Old to Die Young* ostensibly feels worlds away from the gritty handheld aesthetic of Refn's Danish features, even in these films we can glimpse the director's expressionist flourishes and neon dynamism. The *Pusher* trilogy (1996-2005) and *Bleeder* (1999) are unpolished portraits of crime and desperation that predominately operate in a quasi-documentary realist mode, so much so that Mikkelsen credits Refn as the true pioneer to a style that inspired the Dogme 95 movement (Duroche 2012). Despite the film's rough and ready observational style, Copenhagen's criminal underworld provides ample opportunity for Refn's neon worship; bars, brothels, and nightclubs are lit with the hard red, blue, and pink shades that dominate the filmmaker's later work. Moreover, the origins of *Drive*'s elevator scene can be seen at the end of *Bleeder*, when the impossibly awkward Lenny (Mikkelsen) and the beautiful Lea (Liv Corfixen) share a quiet moment. With an overhead spotlight and S M Mongstad's cover of John Lennon's 'Love', Refn transforms the everyday space of a takeaway shop into an abstract and touching reverie.

In *Drive* and *Bleeder*, shifts between realism and expressionism are employed to romantic effect, but Refn is also prone to recruit such stylistic embellishments in more sinister ways. Ordinary environments are metamorphosed into

lynchian nightmare spaces that meld objective reality with the troubled psyches of those who occupy them. In *The Neon Demon* the banal space of a motel room is made strange when splayed hands can be seen pushing through the wall as though it were a malleable border between worlds. The neon-illuminated corridors Julian traverses in the Muay Thai club in *Only God Forgives* seem to be as much a figment of his tormented subconscious as they do a path between rooms. Images of jubilant dancers at Janey's (Nell Tiger Free) 18th birthday party are rapidly intercut with horrific fragments of violent death as her homicide detective boyfriend watches on in *Too Old to Die Young*.

Refn's underappreciated psychological thriller *Fear X* is perhaps the most immersive example of this tendency, however. This film shifts from an obsessive faith in the indexical reality of CCTV to a complete deterioration of any reliable signifiers as to an objective experience outside the self. Bereaved mall cop Harry (John Turturro) spends his nights scanning footage from his workplace for clues as to his wife's killer. In a truly haunting scene, Harry pursues the culprit, stepping out of a motel elevator into an enveloping black nowhere-space, the screen suddenly erupting into an overwhelming barrage of neon-red nondescript imagery. Like a hellish turn on Stan Brakhage's *Mothlight* (1963), abstract fragments and patterns flicker incessantly to Brian Eno's unearthly mechanical score. Eventually, we are released to a quiet but surreal image of the same hotel elevator doors, open and empty, the corridor now immersed in water. The events that transpired between these hypnotic visuals, and our return to realism when Harry awakens in a hospital bed, remain uncertain.

Commercially, if we were to chart Refn's career on a gradient, *Fear X* and *Drive* would surely mark opposite ends. The former film – its ambiguity lost on audiences – failed at the box office, sending Refn's production company into bankruptcy; the latter, an overwhelming success, both endeared him to mainstream audiences and earned him a best director prize at Cannes. As Refn's most bankable and accessible film to date, *Drive* is somewhat anomalous in the career trajectory of an artist so notoriously reluctant to compromise his vision for the sake of popularity. Those who anticipated that his follow up collaboration with Ryan Gosling, *Only God Forgives*, would amount to *Drive 2: Bangkok Drift* are only too well aware of what it means to mistake Refn for a crowd pleaser. When viewed in the context of Refn's other works, however, *Drive*'s exception is one of commercial appeal rather than a deviation from thematic or stylistic concerns. If one is open to discovering Refn's preoccupations, to accepting style as seduction, *Drive* is not only an exceptional film in its own right, but a great entry point into the director's ever-expanding authorial project.

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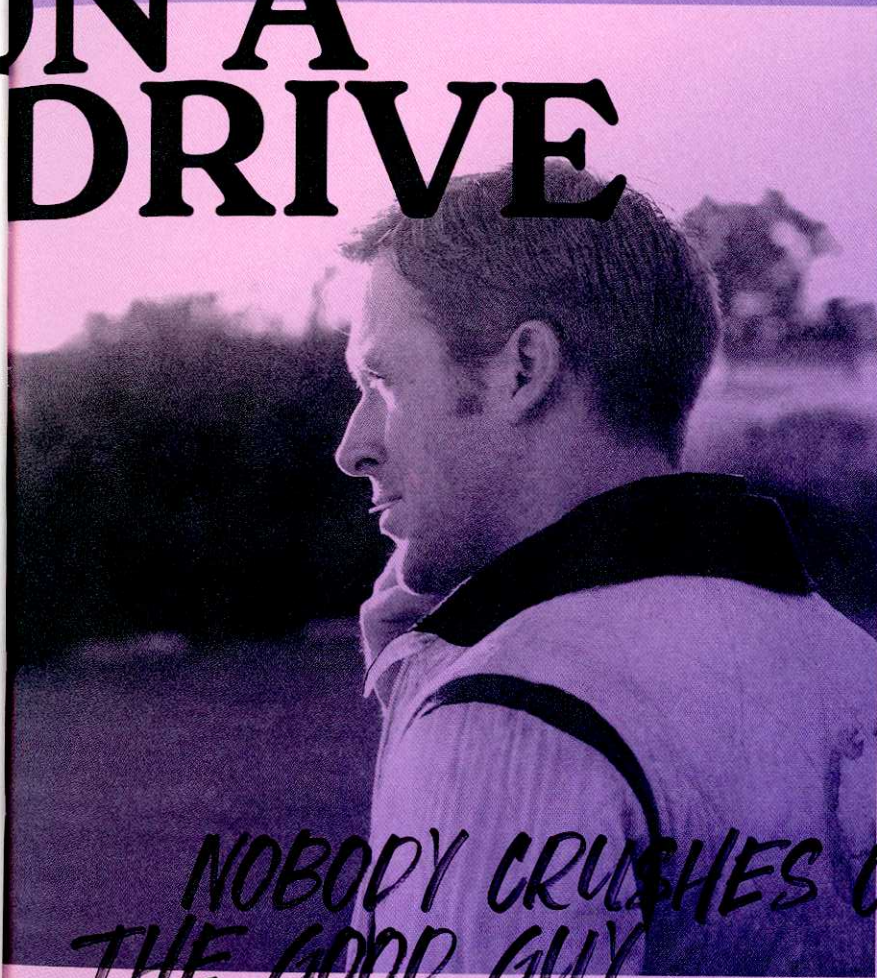
ONCE UPON A TIME... IN DRIVE

BY EMMA WESTWOOD

By the time Ryan Gosling jumped in the driver's seat as protagonist in *Drive*, he had fully proven his swoon-worthy chops. In 2004 with *The Notebook* – an epic, intergenerational tale of love found, love lost and love found again – he hit on that elusive sweet spot for male romantic leads, one where the on-screen portrayal of romance and manliness does not come mutually exclusive. While *Drive* may be a perplexing tangle of genres and influences, especially in the eyes of action audiences who have lamented the film's numerous scenes of lingering looks and sparse dialogue, one thing is for sure: *Drive* is a romance in the truest of senses.

As quoted in the *LA Times* upon the release of *Drive* in 2011, director Nicolas Winding Refn said, 'The whole idea of the movie in terms of the structure really came out of the Grimms' fairy tales. The idea [was] that the film was basically about a man who falls in love with the purity of love.'

To understand Winding Refn's intention is to gain clarity of a film that is, otherwise, a patchwork of direct or indirect influences. Much has been made of *Drive*'s homage to *The Driver* from 1978 – the similarities between their opening heist scenes; the Los Angelean setting (a character in itself); the



NOBODY CRUSHES ON
THE GOOD GUY

flagrant use of blue/green light; the brooding and handsome, blond male leads and their lack of back story (actually, lack of back story for all the characters in both films); even the similarities of film titles themselves and the casting of two Ryans (Ryan O'Neal in the case of *The Driver*). In referencing *The Driver*, *Drive* also homages a mighty lineage of crime and car chase movies – *Bullitt*, *Thief*, *Two-Lane Blacktop*, *The French Connection*, *Point Blank*, *Heat*, the list goes on and on.

Additionally, *Drive* springs directly from a literary source, a pulp noir novella by James Sallis, as acknowledged in the film's opening credits. Stylistically, it bears significant resemblance to Winding Refn's preceding films – the under-appreciated *Only God Forgives* (2013) and the sublime *Neon Demon* (2016) – or, more appropriately, those films bear resemblance to *Drive*.

All these aforementioned influences (and many more) can be easily identified in *Drive*, which could have resulted in artistic confusion but, astoundingly, in this case, come together as a singular cinematic masterpiece, one that is elegant in its unfolding and distinctly uncluttered both narratively and visually. What arguably cements *Drive* in its cohesion, though, is what is missing in all these previously mentioned references: the dreamy romanticism of fairy tales.

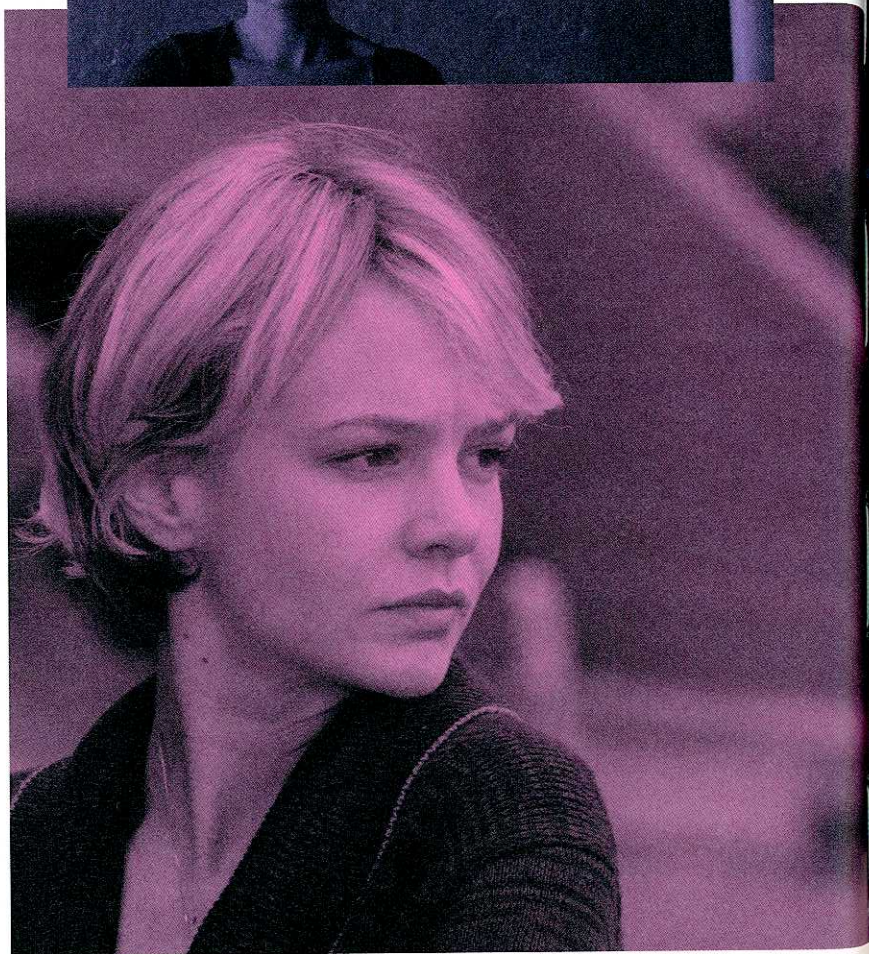
Far from slavishly adhering to all fairy-tale tropes, the makers of *Drive* liberally broach the fairy-tale structure through a pervasive sense of romance. It is the story of a Prince Charming finding his princess. He saves her from evil forces and then sacrifices himself for her safety, which is the ultimate expression of love. The prince and princess might not ride off in the sunset together but we know she is safe and that love conquers all. There is a heartfelt note of hope

at the end that equates to 'happily ever after', even if all the elements are not necessarily in place.

As Prince Charming, Gosling offers the perfect narrative canvas – a blank one, upon which we can impose whatever fantasy we desire. He has the good looks, the charisma and the wherewithal not to say too much, which only adds to his mystery and offers both audience and on-screen love interest with an opportunity to make him who they want him to be. Far from being a cardboard cut-out, though, his nameless character moonlights as a getaway driver and demonstrates a proclivity for bursts of extreme violence (initially hinted through verbal threats, such as an encounter at a diner with a crook from a former job: 'Shut your mouth, or I'll kick your teeth down your throat and I'll shut it for you.' Cue sustained music note). This only makes him more appealing. Nobody crushes on the good guy.

As his Princess Irene, Carey Mulligan is a similarly ideal construct. Her delicateness – in frame, features and personality – makes her ripe for heroic deeds. Their introduction, with him carrying home her groceries after her car has broken down at the supermarket, is a flawless gateway gesture for heroism, creating a foundation upon which our prince can then build. While she may not be asking or consciously looking for help, she has the type of waifish disposition that some males find irresistibly attractive, a girlish woman whose fragile appearance and temperament helps make men feel more like men.

It is important to note that some viewers may take umbrage at *Drive*'s representation of Irene, as well as a somewhat clichéd positioning of hero and





heroine. It also taps into a familiar complaint concerning gender representation in cinema – why does the woman always need saving? Without doubt, Irene is a more conservative illustration of this character (she is even blonde, with blonde characters traditionally signifying innocence). However, one might argue, in presenting such a fairy-tale dynamic, such instantly recognisable tropes go a long way in shaping our expectations as an audience. 'Cliché' and 'stereotype' are often dirty words in film criticism but they don't have to be if the film's makers use them to manipulate our reading of the story in insightful ways, as is the case with *Drive*.

When our prince and princess are together in *Drive*, their world is washed in golden, diffused light that wraps around them (and us) like a warm visual hug. Specifically, a montage sequence – appropriately soundtracked with the film's theme song by College & Electric Youth, 'Real Hero' – plays out through a series of star-filters and sun-flares, giving the sequence a wistful quality as if someone was recalling a cherished memory. Our prince may not have a white stallion as his steed but he does have a chariot: a car. He drives Irene and her young son, Benicio – 'drive' being the verb that propels this film – down a disused highway belt until they eventually hit the end of the road (a figurative forewarning for what is to come) where



they take sanctuary in a small nature reserve. The sequence may fall short of the lovers frolicking hand in hand and making daisy chains (Benicio and the prince do skip stones across the sparkling waters of a small creek bed though) but there is no questioning the sentimentality that has been purposefully imparted.

These are the moments of happiness in an otherwise brutal film that buoy us with hope, giving us a sense of reprieve from the danger and violence that swirls around them. It is through such contrast that their love is given gravity, and our hero is afforded the motivation to go to such extremes to protect Irene and Benicio. This is an example of how the film's makers use cliché rather than



THIS IS CLICHÉ USED FOR GOOD RATHER THAN EVIL

dialogue as a form of shorthand to help us fully understand the motivations of a man who we otherwise know so little about. This is cliché used for good rather than evil.

For such a dark and violent film, *Drive* is undercut by fairy-tale sentimentality. It is conspicuously non-cynical, in keeping with the director's intention of portraying 'a man who falls in love with the purity of love'. Viewing the film through our hero's eyes, at no point do we doubt the authenticity of their love, even when Irene's husband, Standard, returns home after his prison sentence. Our prince and princess are involved in a sexless relationship, meaning

they avoid the stain of adultery, which, in many ways, enables their union to remain solid even after the introduction of a third party and the creation of a love triangle.

In explaining his fairy-tale approach for *Drive* to the *LA Times*, director Nicolas Winding Refn mentioned how the structure of traditional fairy tales means they start sweetly, 'And then when it flips, it goes very dark and extremely violent in its tone and what you see. But in a way, you need that to counter the other.'

All great storytelling requires contrast so, against the sweetness of such a pure love, there needs to be some sort of threat to that love – the evil witches, the wicked stepmothers and sisters, or even the Jewish mob bosses. *Drive* draws heavily on the old 'crime does not pay' moral code, with not even our valiant hero proving infallible. He is fully enmeshed as a getaway driver before he falls for Irene, which means he then eventually falls on his sword. The violence we see erupt from him is alarming, to say the least, and it forces us to question what we think we've learnt about this gent. Nonetheless, as he stomps on a man's face in an elevator until his foot crunches through his skull, we can't

help but feel a tingle of excitement alongside our disgust. The expressions that move across Carey Mulligan's face as Irene in this moment encapsulate that very mix of audience emotions with subtle precision. Such brutality also elevates the sweetness. The scorpion he wears on the back of his jacket has been unleashed and we can now feel its sting.

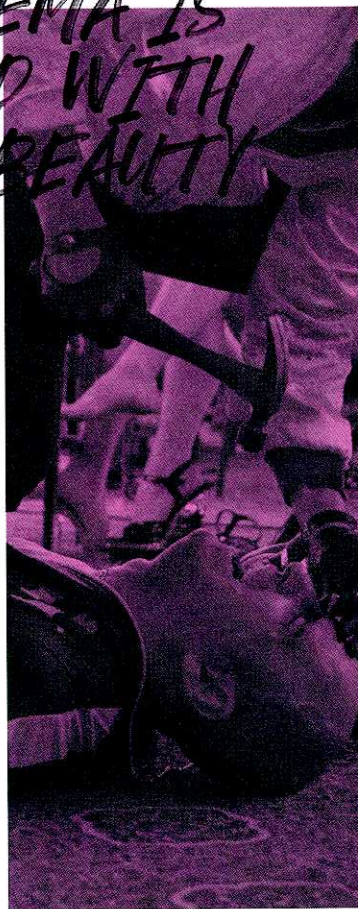
This elevator scene is so important to the film because it involves more than just skull-crushing, it also involves the one and only kiss between our prince and princess. Given the incongruity of the situation – that there are three in the lift, that the lighting of the scene shifts as he draws her protectively behind him to then turn and lock lips, and that the soon-to-be-skull-crushed assassin falls into the shadows of the scene and fails to respond – it suggests this kiss is no more than a figment of his imagination but one that performs an important function for us as the audience, which is the consummation of their love, as innocent as this consummation may be. It gives us satisfaction. The slow motion of the shot – indeed many shots across the course of *Drive* – allows us to breathe it all in and feel immersed in what is a fleeting moment but given more air thanks to the magic of slow-motion cinema.

Violence in cinema is often paired with intense beauty. This might be an uncomfortable realisation for many. But it is simple fact. There is not one shot in *Drive* that does not come framed or composed with perfection in mind, including highly controlled camera movement in the form of incredibly slow, almost imperceptible zooms. Think of the models in the strip club poised in a still-life tableau as our hero shakes down the Albanian henchman, or the revenge sequence when he makes a slow approach to the door of Nino's Pizzeria eerily masked in latex. Interestingly, this vengeance sequence is set

VIOLENCE IN CINEMA IS OFTEN PAIRED WITH INTENSE BEAUTY

to a track by Riz Ortolani – a composer whose music often appeared in Italian exploitation cinema – with this particular piece, 'Oh My Love' (featuring the tense, tremulous vocals of Katyna Ranieri) belonging to a faux documentary from 1971 that depicts slavery and sexual violence, *Goodbye Uncle Tom*.

When our Prince Charming sits in his car/chariot with stab wound to his stomach during the dying scenes of the film, we know he will never see his princess again. But it's not entirely clear whether he dies along with the narrative. There is that golden, warm light again, the reprise of the 'Real Hero' theme song, and a return to those fuzzy feelings evoked when our prince and princess were in a better place driving happily along a disused highway belt. The final shot shows him driving in the middle of

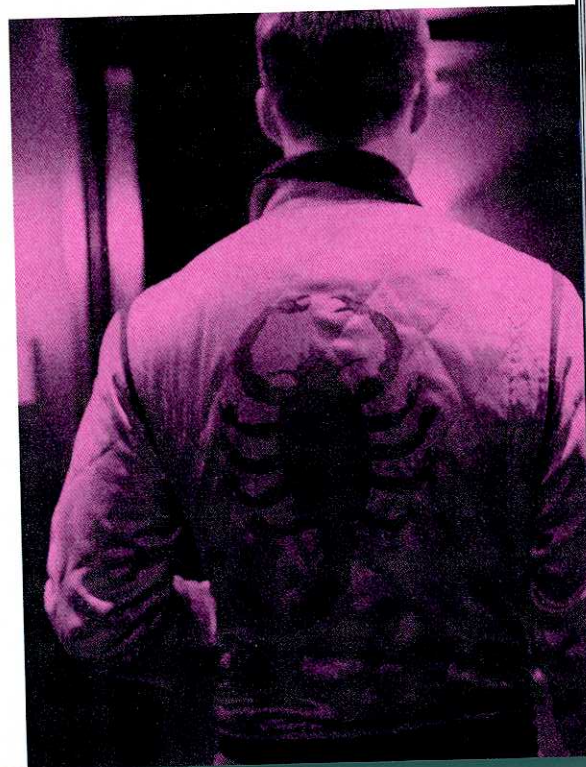


the night but it's hard to say whether these are now just memories that live in his disembodied conscience.

There is a case of a woman in Michigan who filed a lawsuit against the producers of *Drive* for a misleading trailer, among other things, claiming the trailer suggested the film contained more driving sequences. Her complaint against the official trailer is entirely warranted (it succeeds in equally revealing the entire plotline while completely misrepresenting it, which is something of a feat in itself). And she is not the only person who has been confused by *Drive*. This is one film in which the genius becomes most evident when viewing it through rose-coloured glasses.

THE SCORPION HE
WEARS ON THE BACK OF
HIS JACKET HAS BEEN
UNLEASHED AND WE CAN
NOW FEEL ITS STING.

Emma Westwood has written for numerous publications and film festivals, including the Melbourne International Film Festival. She is the author of two cinema books, *Monster Movies* for the Pocket Essential series and a monograph on David Cronenberg's *The Fly* for the Devil's Advocates' series. She is currently co-authoring a monograph with Jez Conolly on John Frankenheimer's *Seconds* for the Constellations series and working on a book of essays for Electric Dreamhouse Press about James Whale's classic from 1935, *Bride of Frankenstein*.

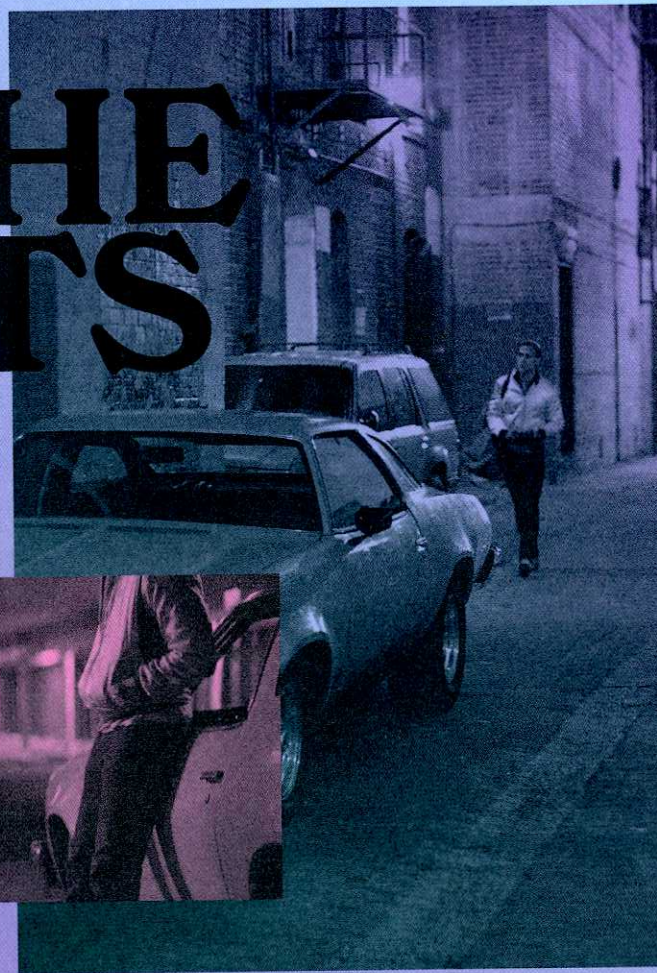


TROUBLE IN PARADISE: THE FALSE FRONTS OF LA NOR

BY MATTHEW THRIFT

'Come to Los Angeles! The sun shines bright, the beaches are wide and inviting, and the orange groves stretch as far as the eye can see. There are jobs aplenty and the land is cheap. Every working man can have his own house, and inside every house, a happy all-American family. You can have all this! And who knows? You can even be discovered, become a movie star, or at least see one. Life is good in Los Angeles. It's paradise on earth... That's what they tell ya anyway, because they're selling an image. They're selling it through movies, radio and television... Yep, you'd think this place was the Garden of Eden. But there's trouble in paradise...'

— *LA Confidential* (1997)





Raymond Chandler was in the right place at the right time. The city of Los Angeles he'd adopted as his home in the years following World War I was fertile ground for the type of pulp fiction he assumed a novice writer might have a chance of success with. The town was a hotbed of crime and political corruption, a frontier metropolis on the make, and still, in those interwar years, a blank enough slate for all manner of business interests – shady or otherwise – to sketch its future according to their own self-serving interests.

One such business was the movies, that dream-weaving factory of fiction and fantasy. As its processes became increasingly industrialised, so it consolidated its base of operations in the city, sprawling under the soon synonymous beacon that advertised a new housing development called Hollywoodland. By the time Chandler published his first novel *The Big Sleep* in 1939, Los Angeles was well established as a city of dualities, tales of vice, scandal and corruption filling the tabloid rags from which Chandler drew, while Tinseltown and its shadowed margins sold glamour and illusory promises.

'Los Angeles is where the relation between reality and representation gets muddled,' says filmmaker Thom Andersen in his seminal essay film *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003), a notion the cinematic canon of LA noir seems endlessly

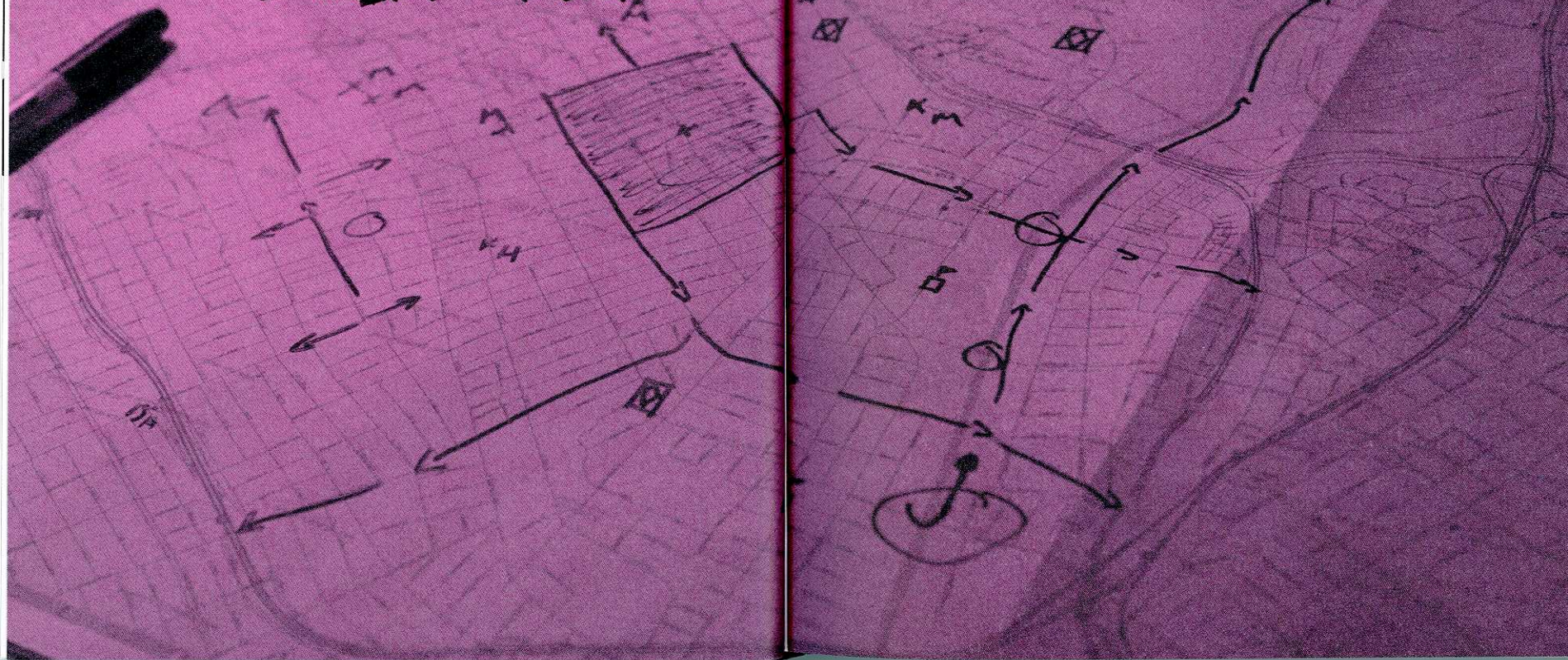
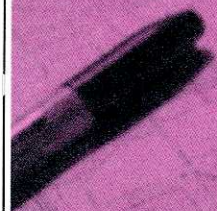
fascinated by. Looking at the city through the lens of these films serves up all manner of buried secrets – surfaces that pave darker truths, masks that provide the cover of respectability for less savoury agendas.

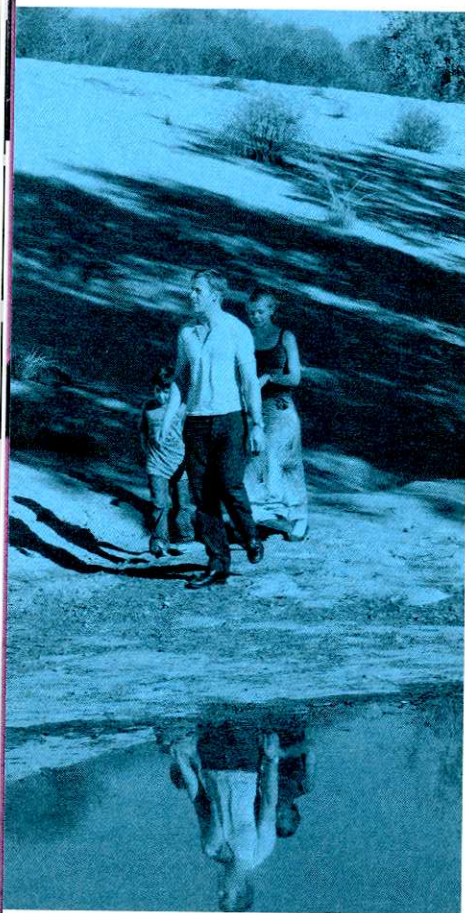
The mask is made literal in Nicolas Winding Refn's *Drive* (2011), worn by its lone-wolf protagonist for a day job flipping cars for the picture business. He's a stunt driver, made up in prosthetics as a cop, a reversal of our introduction to his character minutes earlier. A getaway driver by night, last seen fleeing from the police, this west coast ronin pulls on his mask for a subversion of life

THIS WEST COAST RONIN PULLS ON HIS MASK FOR A SUBVERSION OF LIFE AND ART



LOOKING AT THE CITY
THROUGH THE LENS OF
THESE FILMS SERVES UP
ALL MANNERS OF
BURIED SECRETS





and art, engaged in a simulacrum of violence that muddles, as Andersen would have it, 'the relation between reality and representation'.

It's not the only false front Driver (Ryan Gosling) presents over the course of the film. In time we'll meet the man behind that which he offers up to the objects of his affection, his neighbour (Carey Mulligan) and her young son. When a botched robbery leads to an ambush in a motel, a shotgun and a shower rail paint Driver a new, bloodied veil – or rather peel back the one he's been wearing, revealing the brutality that lies beneath. When we reach the first of the film's climactic showdowns, the lines between reality and representation have ceased to exist, as Driver takes out Ron Perlman's abrasive gangster Nino, wearing his movie-gig prosthetics, the controlled violence of his day job now inseparable from that of his real-life role as righteous avenger. On the film's soundtrack,

Bronwyn Griffin sings ironically of 'real' heroes and human beings, but the 'reality' of Driver is hardly cut-and-dried.

Whether consciously or unconsciously adorned, such literal and figurative masks can be found throughout the LA noir canon, often tied to the Hollywood machine. In Curtis Hanson's *LA Confidential* (1997), a period thriller adapted from the second volume of James Ellroy's defining quartet of novels, Kim Basinger won an Oscar for her portrayal of Lynn Bracken – a name not too far from noir's premier female screenwriter, Leigh Brackett – an escort made-up to look like Veronica Lake, peddling a fantasy of sleeping with the stars for David Strathairn's vice merchant Pierce Patchett. The line between reality and effigy is further echoed in the character of star detective Jack Vincennes (Kevin Spacey), who has a successful TV cop show called *Badge of Honor* made in his image. Said line forms the butt of a gag when Guy Pearce's by-the-book officer attempts to shake down a 'two-bit hooker cut to look like Lana Turner.' 'She is Lana Turner,' Vincennes informs him as he wipes the drink the star has just thrown at him from his eyes. Lynn Bracken may have escaped the surgeon's knife ('It's all me... but I'm not a natural blonde') but she still has to mask her true self to survive in Ellroy's vision of 50s Hollywood, and fulfil the ubiquitous genre function of the femme fatale.

For a more sustained illusion, none come as decadently rendered as that of Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson), the great-star-turned-shut-in of Billy Wilder's gothic LA noir, *Sunset Blvd* (1950). The movie business – and the outside world – has moved on since Norma's glory days as a screen sensation. Not that she knows it from within the confines of her mansion, where her butler Max, once-upon-a-time Desmond's director (and played with a suitably meta

touch by the great Erich von Stroheim, who directed Swanson in her own heyday) maintains her fantasy that she's still a sought after proposition. The psychological dislocation reaches lurid heights with a pair of climactic scenes, as Norma visits the set of her old friend Cecil B DeMille, and upon murdering her house guest, is finally 'directed' into the arms of the waiting police by her steadfast creative companion, Max.

'IT IS ALL
AN ILLUSION'

Not all the masks found in LA noir offer protection, and not all are worn willingly. Norma Desmond's psychic fracture is taken to oblique extremes in David Lynch's masterpiece *Mulholland Drive* (2001), a film which applies, if not the archetypes of classic noir, then certainly the genre's psychological adherence and its uncanniness of mood. Essaying the film's convoluted narrative schemes – and anything resembling a solution to them – would require more space than we have here, suffice to say that the mask unconsciously conjured by Naomi Watts' new-in-town ingenue is a total overhaul of her very being, a psychic split from her (and our) concept of reality. 'It is all an illusion,' we're told in the film's Silencio nightclub where a magic act plays, much like the stage on which Veronica Lake performs her own illusions in *This Gun for Hire* (1942), a film where Lake pretends to be someone else, like Basinger pretends to be Lynn Bracken, who pretends to be Veronica Lake, who watches *This Gun for*



THE CANON OF
LA NOIR IS ITSELF
DRIVEN BY SELF-
REFLECTING QUESTIONS
OF NOSTALGIA.

Hire at her home. Mulholland Drive is its own hall of mirrors, but the canon of LA noir is itself driven by self-reflecting questions of nostalgia.

One can draw an easy thematic line between the key LA noirs of various eras. There's a case to be made for Howard Hawks' *The Big Sleep* (1946), Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973) and David Robert Mitchell's *Under the Silver Lake* (2018) as the defining contemporary LA noirs of their respective periods. The later films are wholly indebted to the genre tropes that began with Chandler and Hawks – *The Big Sleep* being a film more open to the geographical properties of the city than Billy Wilder's earlier, more confined *Double Indemnity* (1944) – while speaking specifically to their contemporary anxieties.

'Although Los Angeles is a city with no history, nostalgia has always been the dominant note in the city's image of itself,' notes Thom Andersen, and it's none more evident than in what is perhaps the quintessential LA noir. Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), while set in the late 1930s and concerned with the political corruption – specifically the redistribution of water – that gave birth to the modern city, is every bit the product of its time, a bleak testament to its director's personal tragedies in a city recovering from the Watts riots and the Manson killings. 'The city could finally become a subject in the early 70s,' says Andersen in *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, 'because it had finally become self-conscious.' The masks worn in *Chinatown* are those of civility, corruption hidden behind an impenetrable wall of money and authority, much like the human-suit worn by Toon supervillain Judge Doom in Robert Zemeckis' thematic heir *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988).

'There is no more beautiful city in the world, provided it's seen at night and from a distance,' Polanski once said of Los Angeles. Like Billy Wilder before him, Polanski applied an immigrant's eye to his adopted home and his take on LA noir, and Nicolas Winding Refn follows in the great tradition of European filmmakers crafting noirs in the United States. If Refn is driven by nostalgia with *Drive*, it's of the aesthetic variety – universal notions of myth and fable, the question of heroism and a romanticised ideal of 80s retro-cool.

Refn's is a film of pristinely cultivated surfaces, his neo-noir leanings more classical than contemporary – not for nothing does *Drive*'s synth score conjure the Michael Mann of *Thief* (1981) over the digital impressionist of *Collateral* (2004). The romanticism of the film's music stands in direct counterpoint to its violence, while lending its dreamy charms to the largely anonymous sections

of the city it inhabits. The viaduct in which Driver takes his neighbour and her son for a spin in the film's most romantically rendered sequence is likely familiar to viewers from countless Angeleno pictures – notably a big set piece in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) – but the rest of the film is largely left to roam through unloved corners of the city and the neighbouring Valley, just as other foreign filmmakers had, like Jacques Demy with *Model Shop* (1969) and Jacques Deray with *The Outside Man* (1972).

There's a pair of LA noirs with which *Drive* most notably shares some DNA. Andersen drolly notes in *Los Angeles Plays Itself* that, given the sprawl of the city, 'The best films about Los Angeles are, at least partly, about modes of transportation.' Not for nothing is the plot of *Sunset Blvd* set in motion as a result of William Holden's car breaking down, the later loss of which to his creditors vanquishes his one hope of escape. In *Drive*, it's the breaking down of Carey Mulligan's car that engenders her and Driver's relationship, symbolising her helplessness in his eyes. Such vehicular malfunctions are not on the cards in Walter Hill's *The Driver* (1978), the film most often cited in relation to Refn's *Drive*. 91 minutes carved from archetype, it may not share the later film's mytho-heroic schemes, but in its stripped-down, existential essentials clearly paved the way for the modern classics of LA neo-noir to which Refn tips his hat.

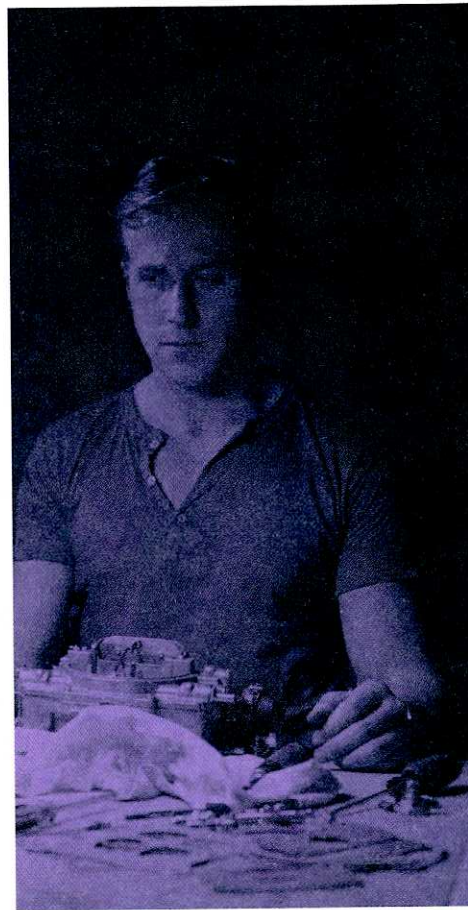
Two decades before *The Driver*, one LA noir seemed to look ahead to the lone-wolf professional of *Drive*. Refn's brilliant opening gambit, that sees Driver touting his wares, elucidating his rules of engagement, finds its prototype in that of Irving Lerner's *Murder by Contract* (1958). Claude (Vince Edwards) doesn't leave his room. He's the consummate professional, doing press-ups

across two chairs while he waits for a call from his boss. 'I wasn't born this way. I trained myself. I eliminate personal feeling.' An assassin for the mob, Claude reasons his amorality in a speech to the two hoods hired to make sure he completes his next job:

'The only type of killing that's safe is when a stranger kills a stranger. No motive. Nothing to link the victim to the executioner. Now, why would a stranger kill a stranger? Because someone's willing to pay. It's business. Same as any other business. You murder the competition. Instead of price-cutting, throat-cutting. Same thing... I look at it like any good business. The risk is high, but so is the profit.'

Like Driver, it's a woman who causes Claude's shield of professionalism to crack, in this case his next target. Claude's mask of brutality slips to reveal a glimpse of the humanity beneath, leading him ultimately to an abandoned Hollywood studio, where he can exact real violence in a fake town, and muddle, as per the wont of LA noir, 'the relation between reality and representation'.

Matthew Thrift works at MUBI and is a freelance film critic for the BFI, *Little White Lies* and *Sight & Sound*.



A REAL HUMAN BEING: THE ANTIHERO IN DRIVE

BY HANNAH STRONG

Nice guys finish last, so the old adage goes. The world doesn't want decent men, but bad boys and rebels without a cause – certainly this explains our appetite for art which grapples with the darker side of humanity and allows us to safely bear witness to amoral or immoral behaviour from the comfort of our own home. We're fascinated with these shades of grey because we ourselves don't exist in black and white, and the extent to which we possess the capacity to do right or wrong has captured the imagination of artists for centuries.

At the heart of this is the antihero: one man (or woman) who operates in the shadowland of morality, raising questions about the nature of right and wrong,



and asking audiences to confront their loyalties. It's a trope that's existed as long as humans have been telling stories, from the work of ancient Greek playwrights right through to modern-day video game protagonists. But what makes a successful antihero, and how do we decide which characters are lovable rogues and which are out-and-out villains? The best antiheroes don't make it immediately obvious how we should decode their behaviour, but we can find some commonalities.

In his neo-noir spectacular *Drive*, Nicolas Winding Refn presents us with a protagonist who calls into question where our sympathies as a viewer lie. Driver, played by Ryan Gosling with his iconic satin bomber jacket and permanent supply of toothpicks, is a vision of consummate cool – and crucially, an antihero for the ages. He also – like most of Winding Refn's leading men – isn't much of a talker, speaking only 891 words (a total of 116 lines) in the whole film. Before *Drive* came Refn's *Valhalla Rising*, following Mads Mikkelsen's silent Viking warrior One-Eye through unending hardships. Afterwards, Refn and Gosling reteamed for the Bangkok fever dream *Only God Forgives* (in which Gosling's muay thai mobster Julian says even less than Driver.) The stoic nature of Driver means we come to know him largely through what he does rather than what he says – but an element of aloofness is essential to the antihero, positioning them as inherently distant from the audience.

Consider one of the most iconic antiheroes of all time, and a key inspiration behind *Drive*: Travis Bickle in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*. Both Travis and Driver are isolated loners whose nighttime car journeys bring them close to others, but never satiate their desire for connection. Both are obsessed with the notion of becoming a hero, speaking in grandiose monologues, fixating



MY HANDS ARE
A LITTLE DIRTY'

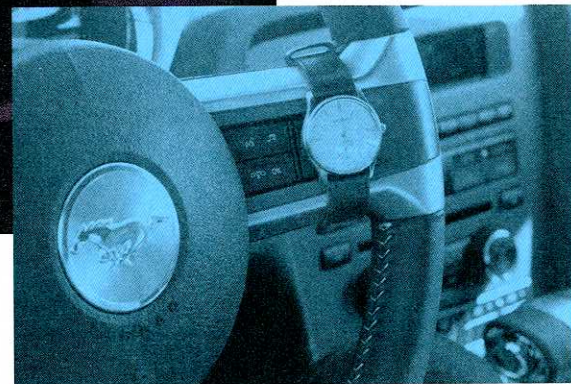
on women they perceive as needing to be saved (coincidentally named Iris and Irene). While Driver listens to synthy electro as he cruises the 'hundred thousand streets in this city', we glimpse Bickle's psyche through voice-over narration, affording us more insight into his deteriorating mental state. It isn't until *Drive*'s most shocking scene – in the elevator of Driver's apartment building – that we realise how far Driver has descended into chaos – and remember how disparate he really is.

Another part of Winding Refn's inspiration for *Drive* came from the seemingly unlikely source of Grimm's *Fairy Tales*, typified by their trope of good always triumphing over evil, albeit often with much bloodshed along the way. Everyone remembers how the Woodsman cut open the Big Bad Wolf's stomach to free Little Red Riding Hood, or when Gretel pushed the evil Witch into the oven of her own candy cottage to avenge her brother Hansel. Sure enough, *Drive* follows the same fairy tale logic crucial to a morally grey hero's arc: evil can only be defeated with a violent act. But there's one crucial difference between *Drive* and the heroes of Grimm's stories: the protagonist in this neon-drenched fairy tale was never innocent to begin with. By his own admission: 'My hands are a little dirty.'



Adjacent to fairy tales are fables, and one plays a key role within *Drive*: the tale of The Scorpion and the Frog. In the fable, a scorpion asks a frog to ferry him across a river. When the frog asks, 'How do I know you won't sting me?' the scorpion replies, 'Because if I do, I'll drown.' Nevertheless, halfway across the river, the scorpion stings the frog and they both begin to sink. 'Why?' asks the frog, and the scorpion replies, 'It's in my nature.' As well as wearing a scorpion emblem on his back, Driver mentions the story to crime boss Bernie Rose, after he's drowned Rose's associate Nino. '[He] didn't make it across the river,' says Driver. Leaning into the moral ambiguity of the antihero, it could be that he is both the scorpion and the frog: in his primary role he ferried criminals across Los Angeles, but once betrayed, he turns poisonous himself. This also feeds into the idea of balance that concerns the archetypal antihero: an eye for an eye.

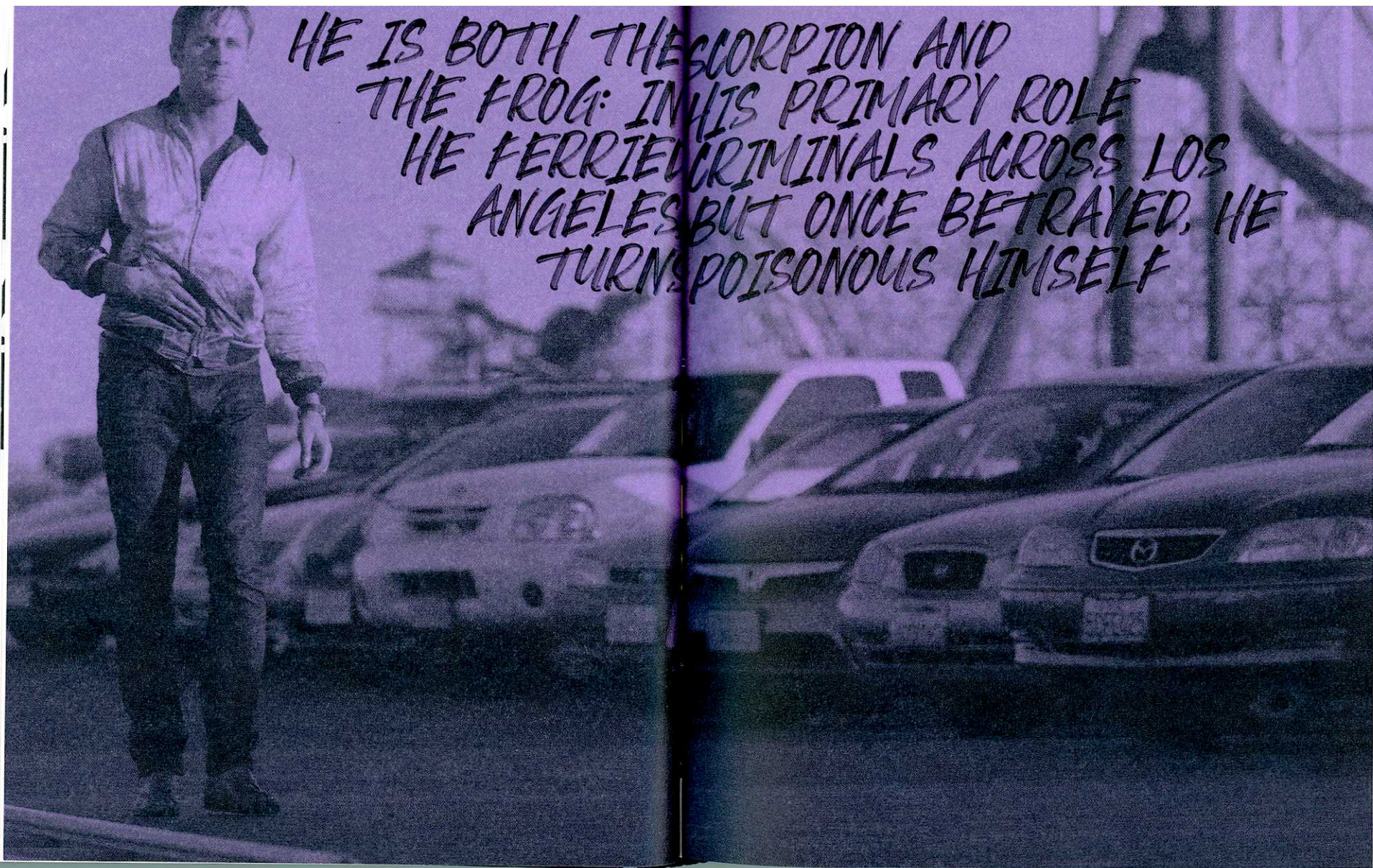
The animal theme continues when Driver watches cartoons with Benicio. When he asks Benicio how he knows the bad guy is the bad guy, he says, 'Because he's a shark.' 'There's no good sharks?' he queries. 'No,' Benicio says. 'Just look at him.' Driver is a shark too – but after meeting Irene and Benicio, glimpses the potential for 'goodness', and a lifestyle far away from



his criminal past. The question of whether a bad guy can truly change their ways haunts plenty of antiheroes, and in this small exchange, we are also reminded of the way children – usually considered the most innocent beings – see the world in black and white terms, whereas adults have to deal with the more complex reality.

But Driver, for his criminal undertakings, also seems to abide by a strict code. In the film's opening scene, he briefs a client over the phone before heading to pick them up: 'You don't need to know the route. You give me a time and a place, and I give you a five-minute window. Anything happens in that five-minute window, and I'm yours. No matter what.' We see this 'five-minute window' play out in real time, as Driver collects his clients from the scene of a robbery, and calmly evades the police throughout the moonlight Los Angeles streets until they reach their destination, blending in with the departing crowds at a local baseball game. Later, when meeting local Los Angeles thug Cook

HE IS BOTH THE SCORPION AND
THE FROG: IN HIS PRIMARY ROLE
HE FERRIED CRIMINALS ACROSS LOS
ANGELES BUT ONCE BETRAYED, HE
TURNS POISONOUS HIMSELF



to negotiate their planned robbery, Driver repeats his set of rules: 'I don't sit in while you're running it down; I don't carry a gun... I drive.' It's a rehearsed set of demands as meticulous as a pit change at a race track: no margin for error, implying a lengthy, well-calibrated career as a criminal. But up until the betrayal which follows, he isn't violent for violence's sake, and has no interest in any involvement beyond driving the getaway car.

This personal set of principles is something shared with some of the most famous antiheroes in cinematic history, notably Sergio Leone's *The Man With No Name* from his *Dollars* trilogy (originally based on Akira Kurosawa's iconic 1961 samurai film *Yojimbo*). Like Driver, in his first appearance within *A Fistful of Dollars*, *The Man With No Name* is an outside force who enters into a conflict in an attempt to right a wrong, and (like Driver) it's only achievable by fighting fire with fire. Even in *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly* (in which he is the apparent 'Good') while hunting buried treasure, *The Man With No Name* exhibits more compassion than his accomplices for the war-ravaged south, remarking on the brutality of the deaths and even sharing a cigar with a wounded soldier. An effective antihero, roguish as he may be, must still have a heart.

We see this early on within *Drive*, as our isolated leading man meets his neighbour Irene and her young son Benicio. Enchanted by them both, he demonstrates a softness at odds with the violence of the underworld he inhabits, and when he becomes aware of the threat to Irene and Benicio due to her husband Standard's outstanding prison protection debt, he steps in to help, despite the fact that this paints a very real target on his back. It could be argued that this action is not truly selfless, as Driver decides to help Standard

because he's attracted to Irene, but it's evident she still loves her husband, and is unaware of Driver's attempts to protect her until the damage has already been done.

Speaking of damage, to the ideal antihero, the ends justify the means. Driver's acts of violence are retribution for the deaths and betrayal that he undergoes – but we also witness him committing acts of disproportionate cruelty. He attacks a terrified Blanche in order to gain information about the set-up, and makes Irene bear witness to a horrific act of violence in their elevator which clearly traumatises her. Perhaps the most haunting scene of the film comes when he nonchalantly disguises himself using a rubber mask, and watches through the window of Nino's pizzeria for the mobster to leave, before running

'I DON'T SIT IN WHILE
YOU'RE RUNNING IT
DOWN; I DON'T CARRY
A GUN... I DRIVE'

him off the road and drowning him in the sea. In a world of monsters, Driver desires to protect what is good, but still must resort to brutality to do so. As the film's tagline suggests, there are no clean getaways.

In the cinematic canon of antiheroes, there is also a crucial element of cool. While caped crusaders can get away with being boy scouts, the most memorable morally grey characters are the ones who carry themselves with a certain poise. It's worth noting there is often no correlation between moral fortitude and 'cool' – think of crooked cop Harry Callahan, whose .44 Magnum

IN A WORLD OF
MONSTERS, DRIVER
DESIRES TO PROTECT
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STILL MUST RESORT
TO BRUTALITY TO DO SO



monologue cemented him as a stone-cold classic, or the hard-drinking Tequila Yuen in John Woo's *Hard Boiled*. With Driver, his ensemble has become synonymous with the film in which he appears and is now the stuff of Halloween costume legend. His white satin souvenir jacket with a golden scorpion emblem and the toothpick in the corner of his mouth where we might expect a cigarette are instantly recognisable and effortlessly stylish. It's an outfit that sets Driver apart in contemporary Los Angeles, and by the end of the film, the jacket, soaked in grime and blood, is a visual shorthand for his unravelling.

As he unravels, his meticulous facade crumbles. He might be cool and collected behind the wheel, but when it comes to the violent acts he commits, he is less precise, opting for close-contact, personal attacks: bludgeoning, drowning, stabbing. Despite the horror of what he does, it's clear it comes from an emotional place: Driver does what he does not for himself, but out of a desire to protect Irene and Benecio, as warped as it may be.

But there's still an element of good necessary for the success of an antihero, and Winding Refn wryly nods to this with his choice of theme song, which returns in the film's closing scene: College and Electric Youth's 'A Real Hero'. Having initially played when Driver glimpsed

happiness with Irene and Benicio, it repeats as Driver cruises into the sunset, destination unknown. While the first time it was a moment of feeling like a 'real human being' amid his constant ennui, the second time round, he's also 'a real hero'. With the threat to Irene and Benicio neutralised, he recognises they will be safer without him around.

Drive's stunning aesthetic and tightly coiled thrills have made it a modern classic, painting Los Angeles as a city of love and loss where a single chance meeting in your apartment building can have unthinkable consequences. Yet the film is carried by the compelling presence of its central character, who holds our attention and sympathy despite the body count he racks up over the course of 90 minutes. As he watches Nino through the window at the restaurant, we become aware that Driver is only ever playing a series of parts: driver, stunt man, hero, and although with Driver every step of the way, aware of how deeply he cares for Irene and Benicio, the distance between them is, in the end, too great to bridge. This is the mark of a great antihero, and what makes Driver such a compelling protagonist: he recognises what he must sacrifice in order to keep the people he cares about safe. Money, his job, his home and beloved Los Angeles – he gives it all up in the end, and is left to do only one thing: drive.

Hannah Strong is the Associate Editor at *Little White Lies* magazine and a freelance journalist covering film and popular culture. She has written for the *Guardian*, BBC, *GQ*, *Vulture*, *NYLON*, *DAZED*, and is currently working on her first book.

MONEY, HIS JOB, HIS
HOME AND BELOVED
LOS ANGELES – HE
GIVES IT ALL UP IN
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IS LEFT TO DO ONLY
ONE THING: DRIVE



STAPLES CENTER CHASE STORYBOARD

STAPLES CENTER CHASE

STORYBOARD

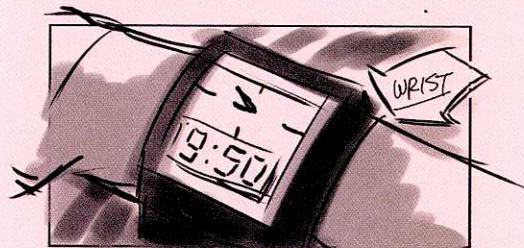
DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE

PAGE: 01

SCENE: 12-22

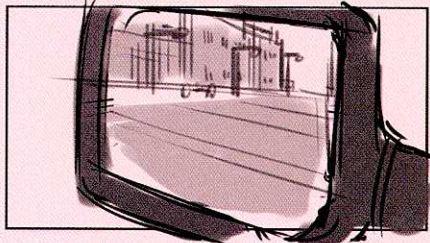
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REVISED: 10-11-10



C.U. - DRIVER'S WATCH - 9:50



DRIVER LOOKS IN SIDE MIRROR



SIDE MIRROR - STREET CLEAR

DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE

PAGE: 02

SCENE: 12-22

DATE: 9-15-10
REVISED: 10-11-10



PAN FROM DRIVER TO PASS. DOORS - ROBBERS JUMP IN



ROBBERS YELL @ DRIVER, "GO! GO!..."



DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE PAGE: 03
 SCENE: 12-22 DATE: 9-15-10
 REVISED: 10-11-10



TWO ROBBERS TAKE OFF MUCKS



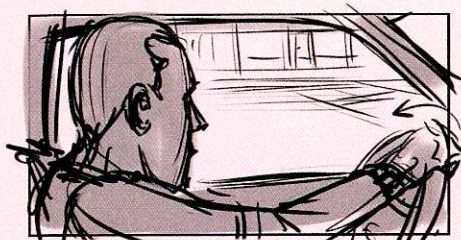
OVER DRIVER - PEOPLE CROSS STREET -



DRIVER CASUALLY ADJUSTS MIRROR -

DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE PAGE: 04
 SCENE: 12-22 DATE: 9-15-10
 REVISED: 10-11-10



DRIVER STARTS A U-TURN -



ROBBERS AMPED UP!



OUT WINDSHIELD - ROBBERS VOLUNTEER FIND - DRIVER CASUAL, CALM.

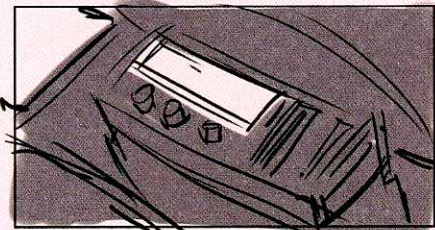
DRIVE

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SCENE: 12-22

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12

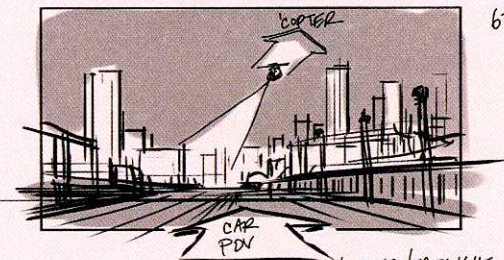
POLICE SCANNER INSERT



3

(BOYLE TO 6th)

ON DRIVER - Robbers behind



6TH ST BRIDGE

SIXTH ST. BRIDGE - BUMPER CAM - COPTER / SPOTLIGHT APPROACHING

DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE

PAGE: 06

SCENE: 12-22

DATE: 9-15-10
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DRIVER MAKES A HARD LEFT @ END OF BRIDGE

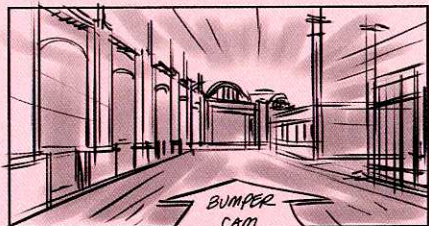
END OF 6TH ST BRIDGE
HARD LEFT ON
MESQUITE ST.



LOOKING BACK - ROBBERS 'HOLDING ON' - SPOTLIGHT SWEEPS THEM BEHIND THEM!

DRIVE

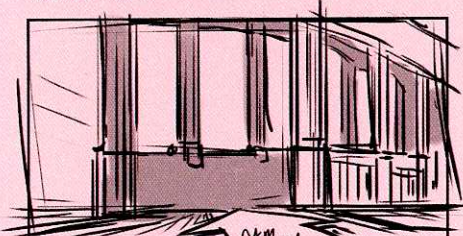
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 SCENE: 12-22 REVISED: 10-11-10



RUSHING DOWN

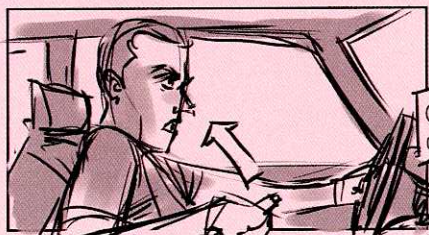
BUMPER
CAM

MESSQUITE ST.



CONT'D... UNDER 6th ST BRIDGE

CAM
MOVED



DRIVER PINS HANDBRAKE - WHIP PAN FORWARD...

CAM
CONT'D

DRIVE

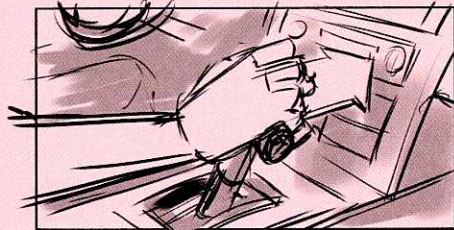
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 SCENE: 12-22 REVISED: 10-11-10



CONT'D... THRU WINDSHIELD - AS CAR IS POWERSUDDING AT 180°



DRIVER LAMS INTO 180 - BARBERS HOLD ON - B.G. SPINNING



INSERT - DRIVER SLAMS INTO REVERSE

DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE PAGE: 09
SCENE: 12-22 DATE: 9-18-10
REVISED: 10-11-10



LOW ANGLE - DRIVER LOOKS BACK - DRIVING FAST



BACKING UP CAR UNDER 6th & BRIDGE



A DRIVER TURNS OFF LIGHTS B SPOTLIGHT SWEEPS THRU
'COPTER SOUND FX

DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE PAGE: 10
SCENE: 12-22 DATE: 9-18-10
REVISED: 10-11-10



Robber looks up



Robber "listens" & looks



LOW 3 - OTS DRIVER - SPOTLIGHT DISAPPEARS

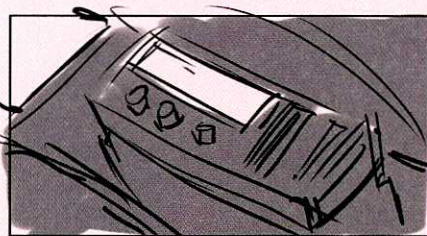
DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE

PAGE: 11

SCENE: 12-22

DATE: 9-15-10
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12

POLICE SCANNER - COPTER GOES A DIFF. DIRECTION



LOW ANGLE - DRIVER CALMLY LISTENING



OTS DRIVER - NO LIGHTS - SNAKING TO WINDOW ST.

DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE

PAGE: 12

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DATE: 9-15-10
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① SIREN LIGHTS APPROACHING - WHIP OFF ROBBERS!!!



Cont'd - DRIVER PULLS BEHIND DUMPSTER -



DRIVER LOOKS IN MIRROR - POLICE LIGHTS GETTING CLOSER

DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE

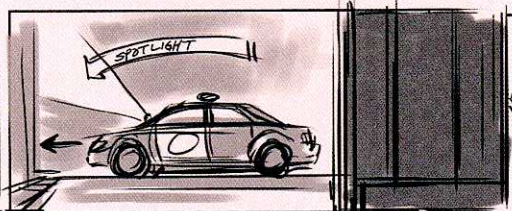
PAGE: 13

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REVISED: 10-11-10

SCENE: 12-22



DRIVER LOOKS AROUND DUMPSTER



DRIVER POV - COP DRIVES PAST, SPOTLIGHT SWEEPING.



INSERT DRIVER ACCELERATES

13

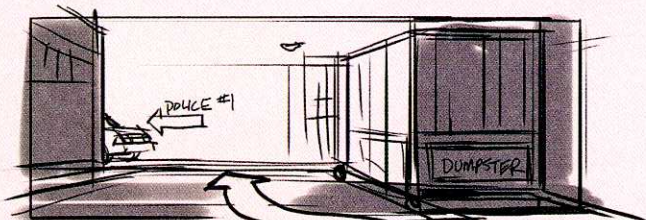
DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE

PAGE: 14

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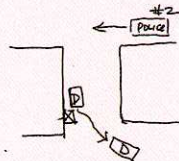
BUMPER CAM - JUST AS COP DISAPPEARS
CAR MOVE OUT FROM BEHIND DUMPSTER



DRIVER FOLLOWS POLICE CAR



THRU RR WINDOW - JUST CATCH POLICE CAR AS WE 'ROUND CORNER

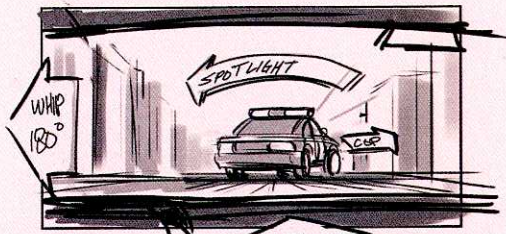


DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE PAGE: 15

SCENE: 12-22

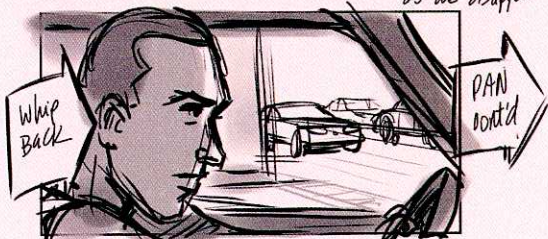
DATE: 9-15-10
REVISED: 10-11-10



DRIVER FALLS IN LINE CAR BEHIND COP CAR #1 AS IT TURNS



CONT'D... RR WINDOW - JUST catch a glimpse of a Cop car #3 as we disappear around corner



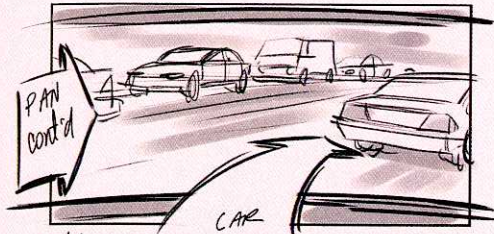
CONT'D - DRIVER pulls to a busy intersection

DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE PAGE: 16

SCENE: 12-22

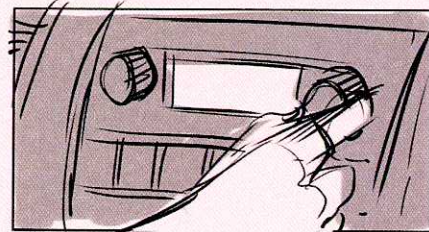
DATE: 9-15-10
REVISED: 10-11-10



CONT'D... TURN windshield - as car enters traffic



ANGLE ON DRIVER TURNING ON RADIO



INSERT - DRIVER TURNS UP RADIO B.BALLGAME

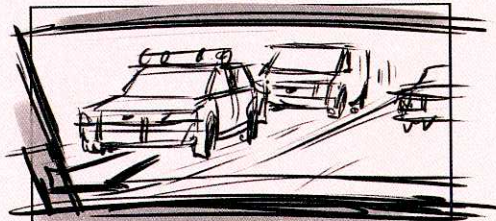
DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE

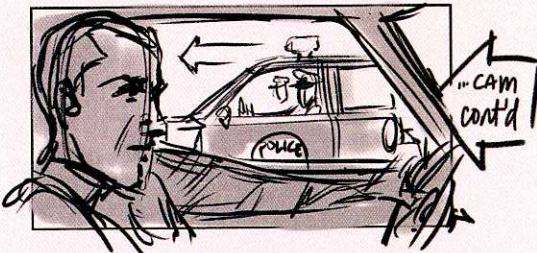
PAGE: 17

SCENE: 12-22

DATE: 9-15-10
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THRU WINDSHIELD - COP CAR coming opposite direction



C.U. ON POLICE PASSING THEM FRAME

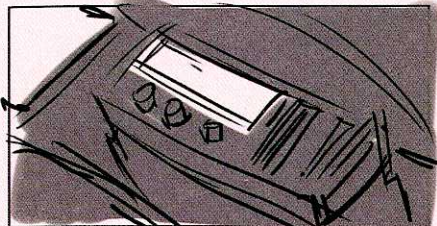
DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE

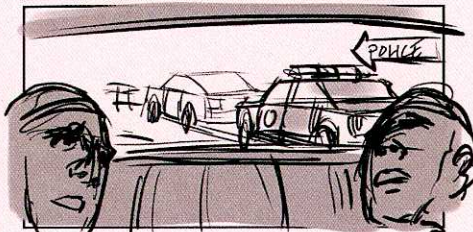
PAGE: 18

SCENE: 12-22

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POLICE SCANNER - "Check it out, 1 David 16"



RR WINDOW - POLICE CAN'T TURN, TOO MUCH TRAFFIC



RR VIEW MIRROR - DRIVER GLANCES - LISTENING TO SCANNER

DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE

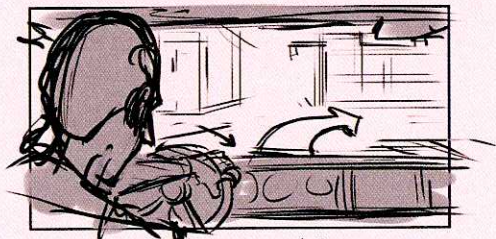
PAGE: 19

SCENE: 12-22

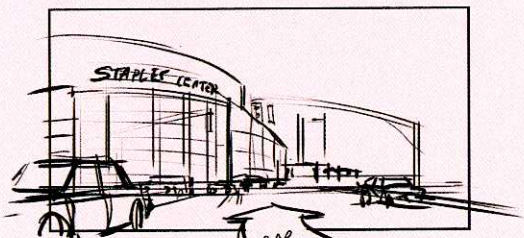
DATE: 9-15-10
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BACK TO RR WINDOW - COP DOES A U-TURN!



DRIVER MAKES A HARD RIGHT



BUMPER CAM - Pick-up on the turn - reveal STAPLES CENTER

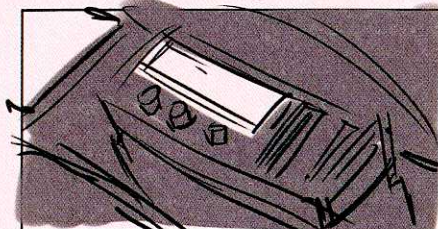
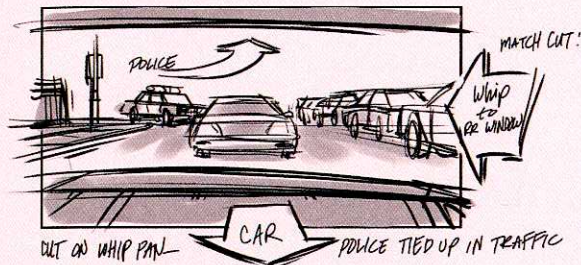
DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE

PAGE: 20

SCENE: 12-22

DATE: 9-15-10
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INSERT - SCANNER - "REQUEST AIRSHIP"



ROBBER LOOK UP - PASSING STAPLES CTR FOR HELICOPTER

DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE PAGE: 21
DATE: 9-15-10
REVISED: 10-11-10
SCENE: 12-22



HARD RIGHT ON
ALBANY ST

THRU WINDSHIELD - POLICE APPROACH - SPOTLIGHT CLOSING IN -



OUT TO DRIVER mid-turn - SPOTLIGHT SWEEPS BEHIND THEM



CONT'D - Robber freaks
"They're closing in!"
DRIVER TURNS HARD!

HARD RIGHT ON
12th ST

DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE PAGE: 22
DATE: 9-15-10
REVISED: 10-11-10
SCENE: 12-22



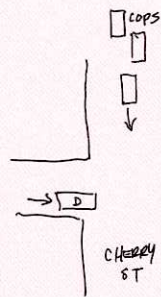
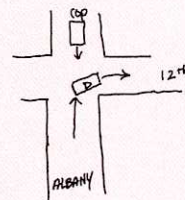
CONT'D - Head turn - Robber Slams to the Side



MID-TURN... Pass an approaching COP CAR -



PROFILE - PINGS UP TO INTERSECTION



DRIVE

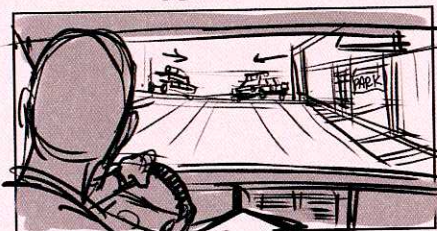
STAPLES CTR CHASE PAGE: 23
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SCENE: 12-22 REVISED: 10-11-10



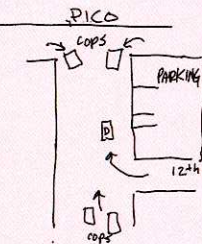
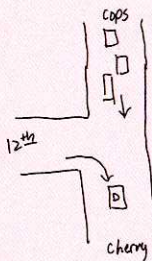
DRIVER POV - Street sign -



DRIVER TURNS CAR on Cherry - cops closing in!



Reverse X - thru windshield - CAR cops block off ahead

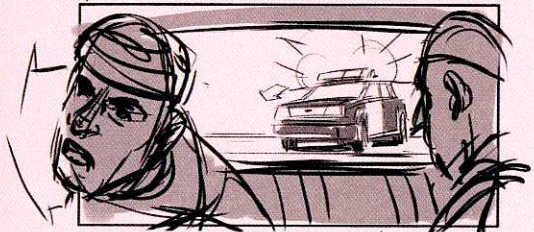


DRIVE

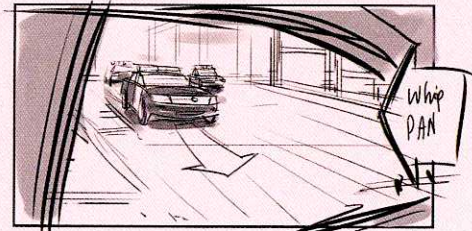
STAPLES CTR CHASE PAGE: 24
DATE: 9-15-10
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DRIVER TURNS INTO PARKING GARAGE



RR WINDOW - cops block from behind - Robbers Free!



Cont'd - Whip to side rr window - cops close in!

DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE

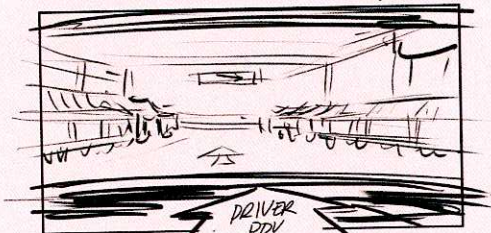
PAGE: 25

SCENE: 12-22

DATE: 9-15-10
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Side window - DRIVER punches ticket



DRIVER POV
FULL PARKING LOT - DRIVING THEM



DRIVER turns in in

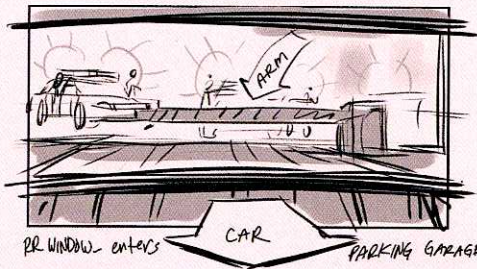
DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE

PAGE: 26

SCENE: 12-22

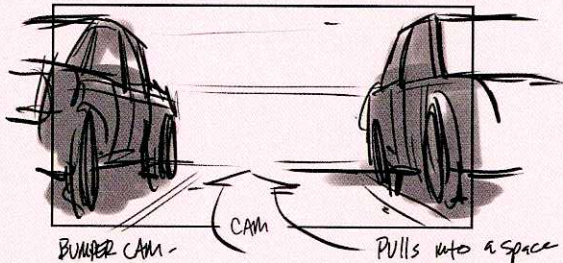
DATE: 9-15-10
REVISED: 10-11-10



RR WINDOW - ENTERS

CAR

PARKING GARAGE



BUMPER CAM -

CAM

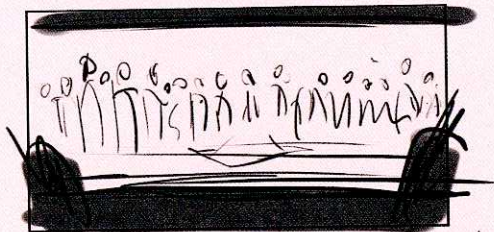
PULLS INTO A SPACE



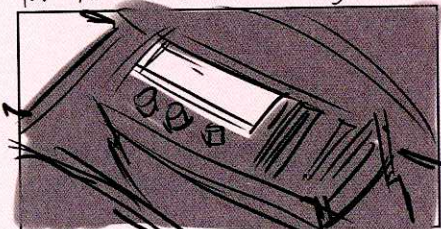
C.U. DRIVER in RR mirror -

DRIVE

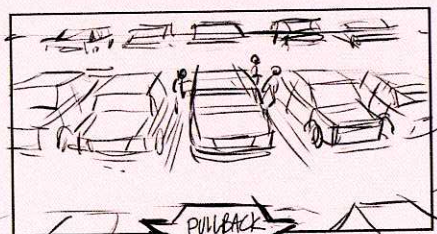
STAPLES CTR CHASE PAGE: 27
 SCENE: 12-22 DATE: 9-15-10
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PON - hundreds of fans streaming towards them



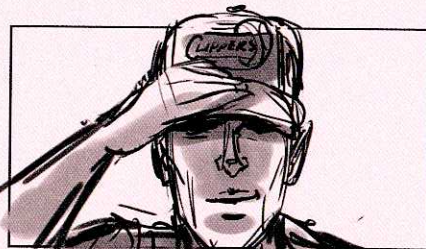
Police Scanner - "White sedan in garage..."



wide pullback as they get out - sea of white sedans

DRIVE

STAPLES CTR CHASE PAGE: 28
 SCENE: 12-22 DATE: 9-15-10
 REVISED: 10-11-10



DOLLY BACK w/ DRIVER DRIVER SMIRKS



- ROBBERS SCATTER
 - DRIVER WALKS AWAY FROM CAM.



DRIVER DISAPPEARS IN A SEA OF FANS - Cops rush thru past him -

BANK CHASE

STORYBOARD

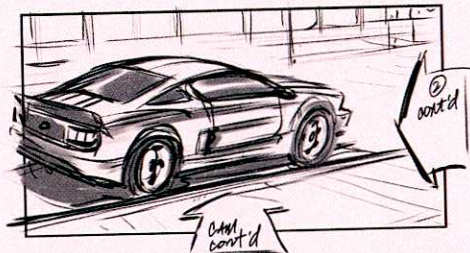
DRIVE

BANK CHASE PAGE: 01
SCENE: 81 - 91 DATE: 9-01-10
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Tracking back w/ Blanche

Camera swings around...

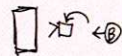


CONT'D - ... into a moving POV

Mustang waiting

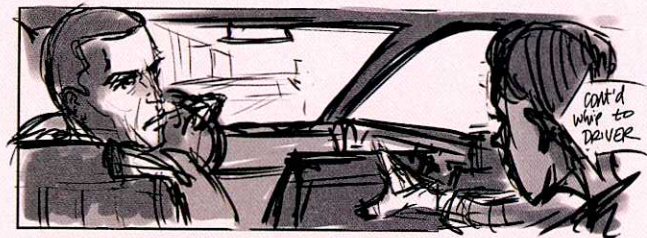


CUT TO: INT Mustang - Blanche opens door, gets in

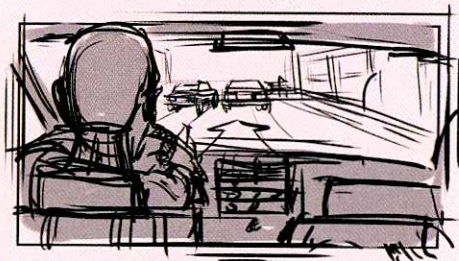


DRIVE

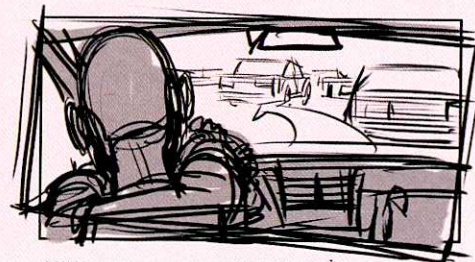
BANK CHASE PAGE: 02
SCENE: 81 - 91 DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED: 9-21-10



CONT'D - ... Pan over to DRIVER as Blanche gets in



CONT'D - ... Mustang takes off!



CONT'D - ... Driver moves expertly thru traffic



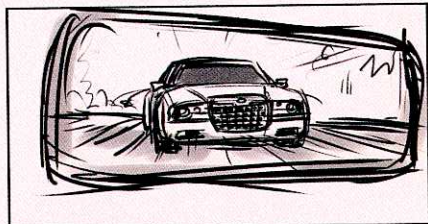
DRIVE

BANK CHASE

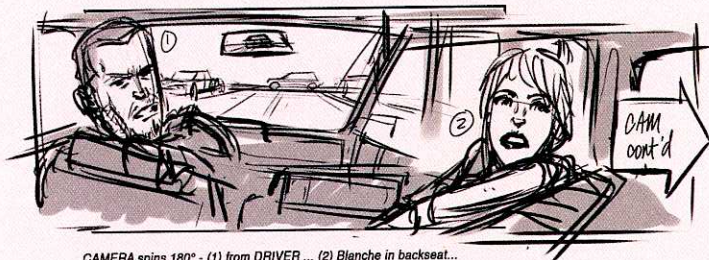
PAGE: 03

SCENE: 81 - 91

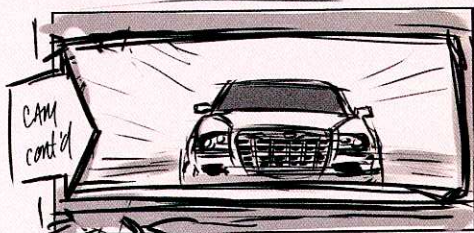
DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED: 9-21-10



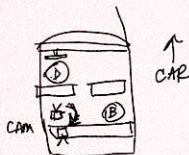
INT MUSTANG - Chrysler 300 in RR VIEW MIRROR



CAMERA spins 180° - (1) from DRIVER ... (2) Blanche in backseat...



CONT'D - (3)... to the rear window - Chrysler 300 on their tail



DRIVE

BANK CHASE

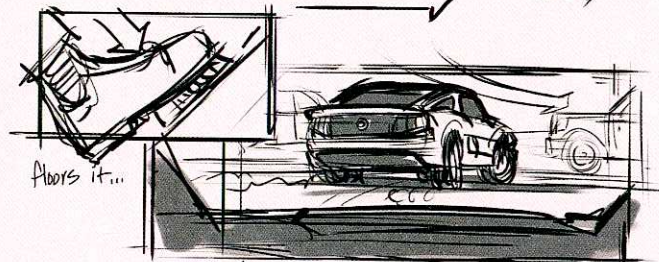
PAGE: 04

SCENE: 81 - 91

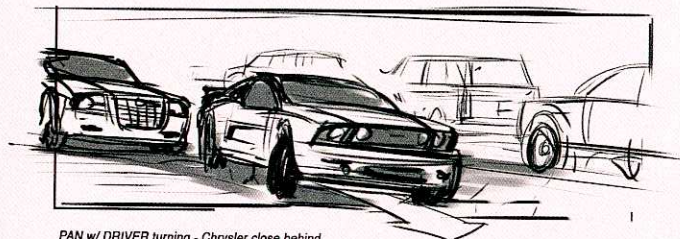
DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED: 9-21-10



LOWWIDE ANGLE - CAMERA swings 180° back to DRIVER



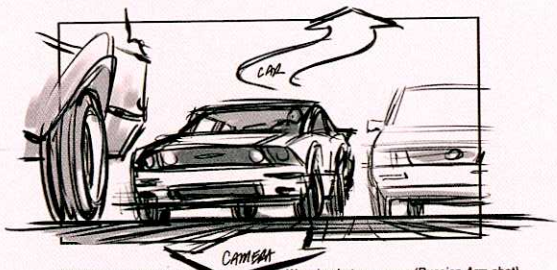
Chrysler 300 POV - DRIVER turns onto main road



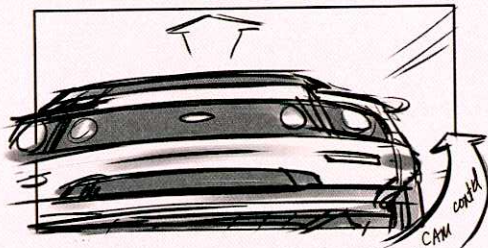
PAN w/ DRIVER turning - Chrysler close behind

DRIVE

BANK CHASE PAGE: 05
 SCENE: 81 - 91 DATE: 9-01-10
 REVISED: 9-21-10



TRACKING w/ Mustang Weaving between cars (Russian Arm shot)



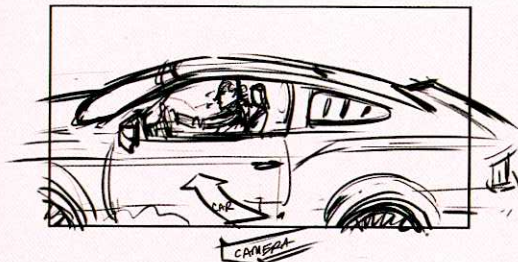
CONT'D - ... Mustang right up to CAM - as CAM swings up & to the side...



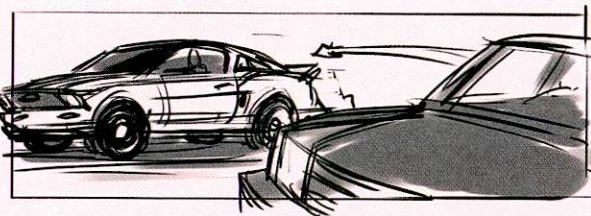
CONT'D - ... reveal RYAN GOSLING driving the Mustang - continue tracking

DRIVE

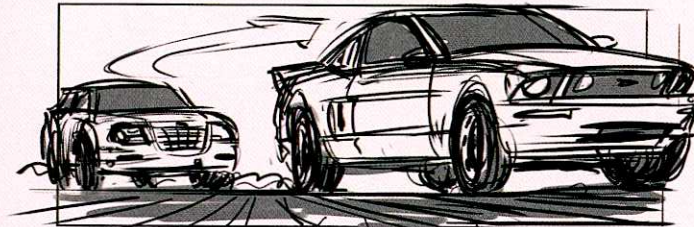
BANK CHASE PAGE: 06
 SCENE: 81 - 91 DATE: 9-01-10
 REVISED: 9-21-10



CONT'D - ... shot continues - Gosling swerves away from CAMERA...



CONT'D - ... tracking w/ Mustang as we pass a FG car.



CONT'D - ... MUSTANG crosses road, turns hard. Chrysler right on him. END RUSSIAN ARM SHOT

DRIVE

BANK CHASE

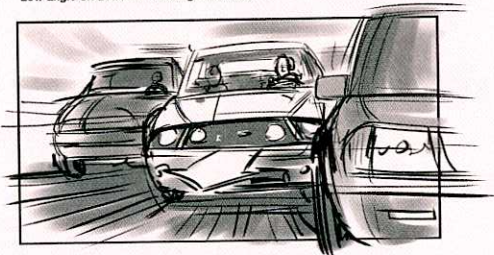
PAGE: 07

DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED: 9-21-10

SCENE: 81 - 91



Low angle on DRIVER - moving thru traffic



L. Lens-

Mustang weaving between cars...



Chrysler 300 POV - Driver weaving thru cars - hard for Chrysler to keep up

DRIVE

BANK CHASE

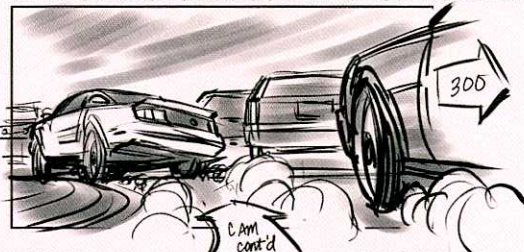
PAGE: 08

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REVISED: 9-21-10

SCENE: 81 - 91



Low/ Tracking w/ Mustang- Chrysler 300 edging into frame - Mustang SLAMS ON BRAKES...



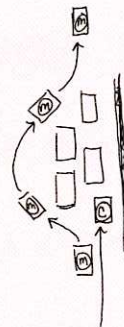
CONT'D - Mustang jives fast...

reveal traffic right in front!
300 SLAMS on brakes! disappears



CONT'D - CAM continues w/
Mustang going around
traffic...

CONT'D NEXT PAGE



DRIVE

BANK CHASE

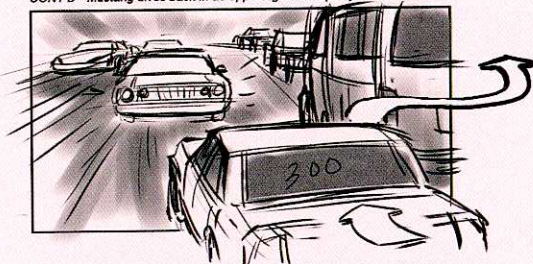
PAGE: 09

SCENE: 81 - 91

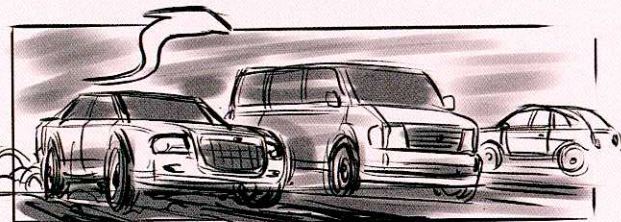
DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED: 9-21-10



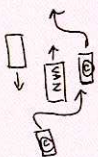
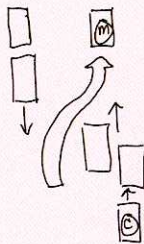
CONT'D - Mustang dives back in as opposing traffic zips by CAMERA!



CUT BACK to 300 - tries same move but ducks back - opposing traffic in the way



OTHER SIDE - 300 dives into the shoulder to pass the van



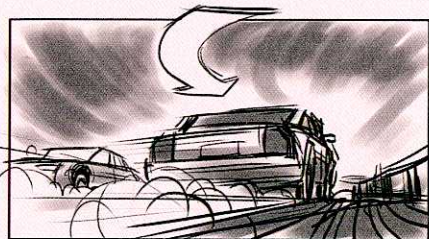
DRIVE

BANK CHASE

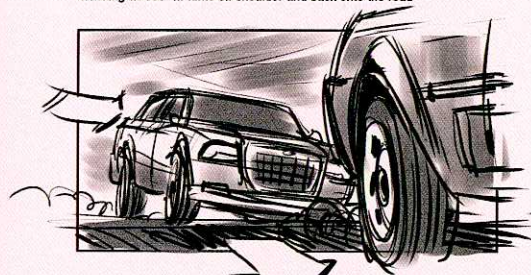
PAGE: 10

SCENE: 81 - 91

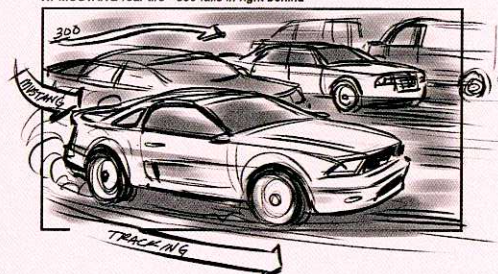
DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED: 9-21-10



Tracking w/ 300- ... turns off shoulder and back onto the road



W/ MUSTANG rear tire - 300 falls in right behind



tracking thru traffic - Mustang & 300 splitting traffic at speed



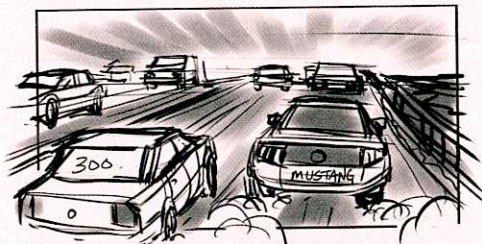
DRIVE

BANK CHASE

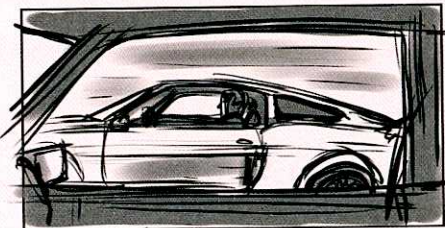
PAGE: 11

SCENE: 81 - 91

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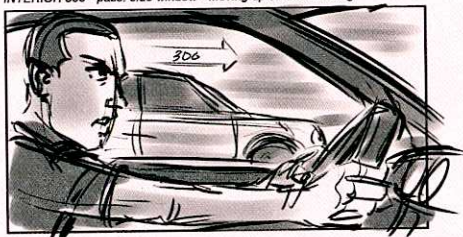


tracking w/ Mustang - 300 MOVES UP along side



300 GAINS ON MUSTANG

INTERIOR 300 - pass. side window - Moving up on the Mustang



INT Mustang - w/ DRIVER - 300 gaining on him

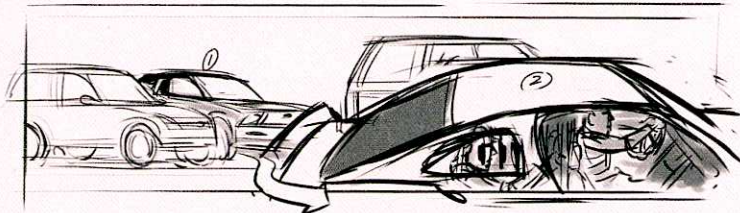
DRIVE

BANK CHASE

PAGE: 12

SCENE: 81 - 91

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Tracking w/ Mustang weaving thru cars- moving right up to CAM and away from CAM @ speed



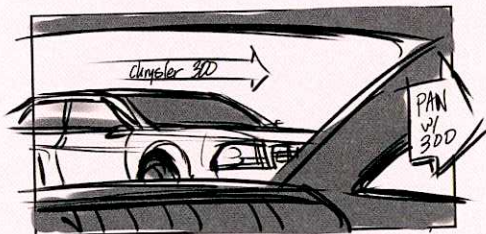
INT Mustang - Whip Pan from windshield to...



CONT'D - ... whip pan back 180° - Chrysler matching ,oves

DRIVE

BANK CHASE PAGE: 13
DATE: 9-01-10
SCENE: 81-91 REVISED: 9-21-10



CONT'D - ...Chrysler moves up along side of Mustang...



CONT'D - ... Chrysler 300 fighting to move up along side of Mustang...



Cut to: DRIVER sees the Chrysler inching up- he turns...

DRIVE

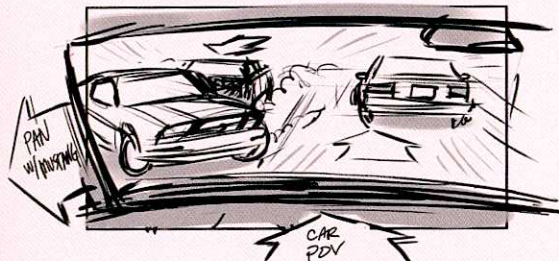
BANK CHASE PAGE: 14
DATE: 9-01-10
SCENE: 81-91 REVISED: 9-21-10



300 hits rear corner of Mustang - Pit Manuver



Driver pulls brake lever, turns hard (start drifting 270° spin move)



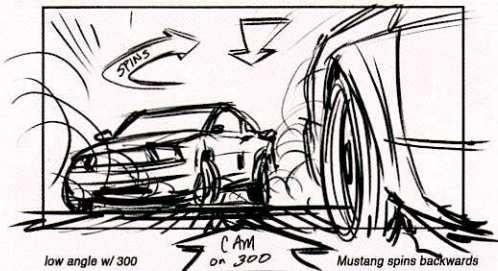
INT OPPOSING TRAFFIC CAR- THRU WINDSHIELD - SEE MUSTANG START TO DRIFT

DRIVE

BANK CHASE
 SCENE: 81-91
 DATE: 9-01-10
 REVISED: 9-21-10
 PAGE: 15



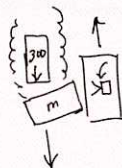
CONT'D - INT opposing traffic car - side window - pan w/ Mustang as it spins



low angle w/ 300
 Mustang spins backwards



INT Mustang - Spin nose to nose with the 300 - Mustang travelling backwards



DRIVE

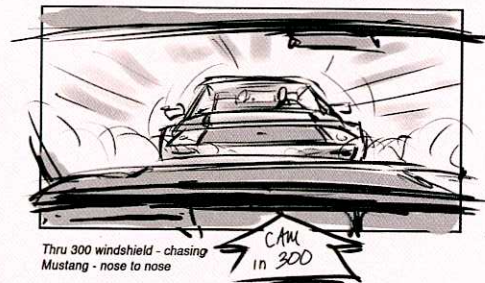
BANK CHASE
 SCENE: 81-91
 DATE: 9-01-10
 REVISED: 9-21-10
 PAGE: 16



Low angle - Driver looks thru back window - *Mustang moving BACKWARDS



CONT'D - pan over - between front seats - see the road ahead

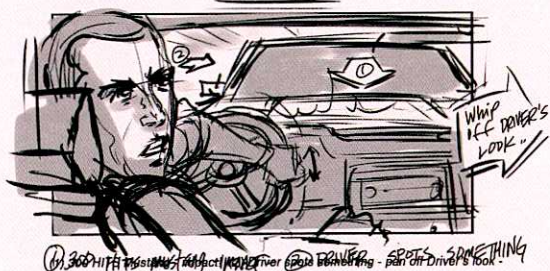


Thru 300 windshield - chasing Mustang - nose to nose



DRIVE

BANK CHASE
PAGE: 17
DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED: 9-21-10
SCENE: 81-97

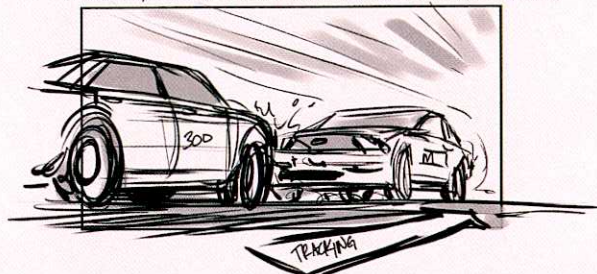


300 HITS 300 MUSTANG DRIVER SPOTS SOMETHING - pan off Driver's look



CONT'D - tracking cement truck

CONT'D - Whip Pan - Driver POV thru side window - See CEMENT TRUCK in the distance



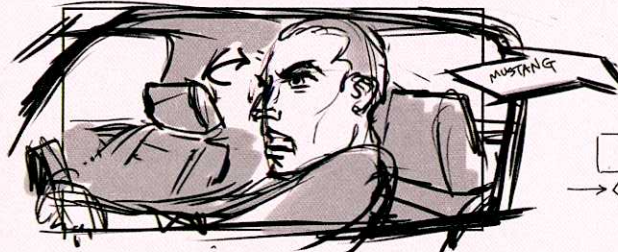
Low angle - tracking - 300 hitting the Mustang - nose to nose

DRIVE

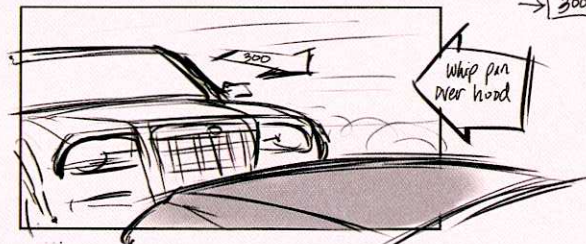
BANK CHASE
PAGE: 18
DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED: 9-21-10
SCENE: 81-97



Driver POV - Mustang RR Window - coming up fast on INTERSECTION AND CEMENT TRUCK



Thru driver's side window - DRIVER LOOKS BACK TO 300 - Mustang moving fast in reverse



CONT'D - Whip CAM 180° - looking over Mustang's hood- 300 charges forward for another hit

DRIVE

BANK CHASE

PAGE: 19

SCENE: 81 - 91

DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED: 9-21-10



CONT'D - whip back to Driver as he turns hard - Mustang spins away from CAM



CONT'D - Mustang turning and spinning away from CAMERA



OTS Driver - thru windshield - Mustang spinning away from 300



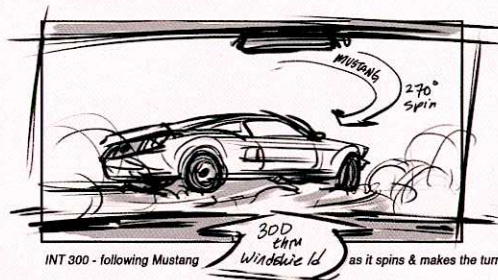
DRIVE

BANK CHASE

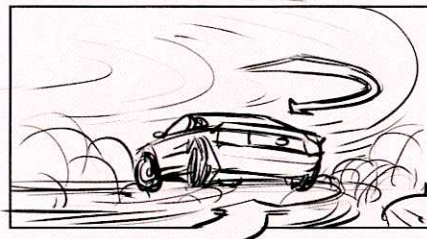
PAGE: 20

SCENE: 81 - 91

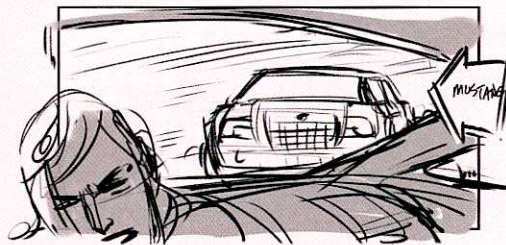
DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED: 9-21-10



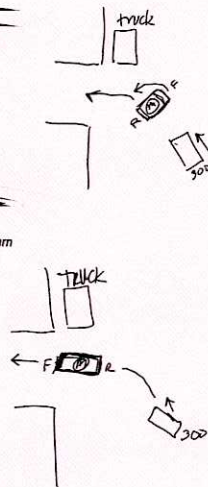
INT 300 - following Mustang



clean travelling shot - Mustang completes the 270° and makes the turn



INT Mustang- thru rr window - Mustang spins - chasing 300 comes back into view



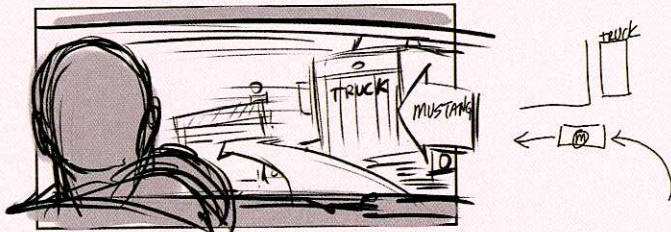
DRIVE

BANK CHASE

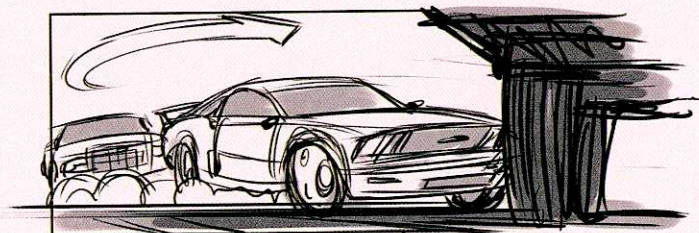
PAGE: 21

SCENE: 81 - 91

DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED: 9-21-10

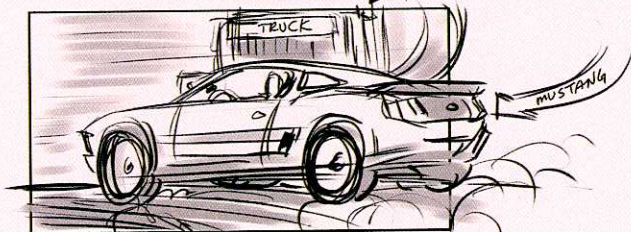


INT Mustang - Driver turns - just missing the truck



CAM tracks Mustang

track w/ Mustang to Cement Truck in F.G.



Reverse angle - Mustang makes the turn - Cement truck in the B.G.

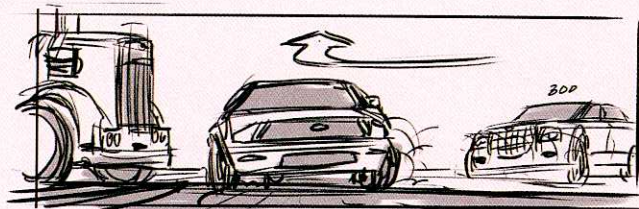
DRIVE

BANK CHASE

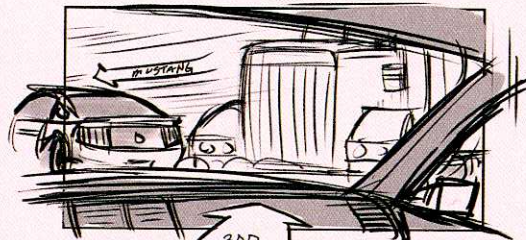
PAGE: 22

SCENE: 81 - 91

DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED: 9-21-10

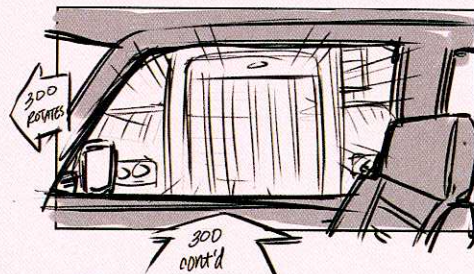


panning w/ Mustang making the turn - 300 sliding in fast



Thru 300 windshield -

coming in hot - sliding to the truck



CONT'D - ... sliding as CAM stays on the truck

DRIVE

BANK CHASE

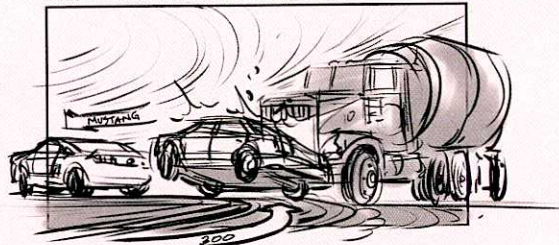
PAGE: 23

SCENE: 81 - 91

DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED: 9-21-10



CONT'D - ...300 SLAMS INTO THE CEMENT TRUCK!



WIDE on the 300 t-boning the cement truck



Low/wide angle - 300 flips over the top of the cement truck

DRIVE

BANK CHASE

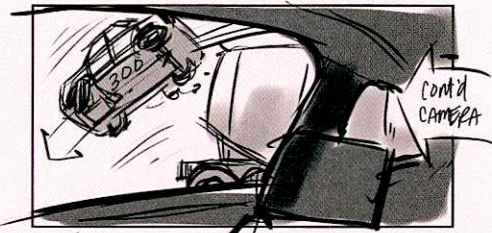
PAGE: 24

SCENE: 81 - 91

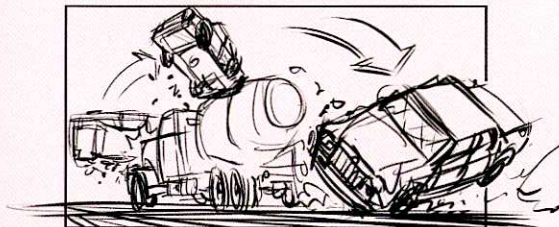
DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED: 9-21-10



INT Mustang - RR window - see 300 hitting the cement truck



CONT'D - side window -... CAM pans w/ 300 as it flips over the truck



angle on 300 flipping and crashing behind the cement truck

ELEV- ATOR TAN SUIT

STORYBOARD

DRIVE

ELEVATOR - TAN SUIT

PAGE: 01

SCENE:

DATE: 9-28-10
REVISED:



ELEVATOR



DRIVER POV - TAN SUIT MAN

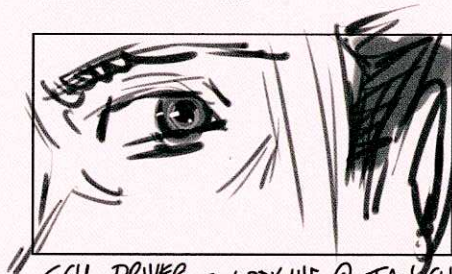
DRIVE

ELEVATOR - TAN SUIT

PAGE: 02

SCENE:

DATE: 9-28-10
REVISED:



ECU DRIVER - LOOKING @ TAN SUIT..



cont'd - ... LOOKS DOWN.



DRIVER POV - GUN under jacket!

DRIVE

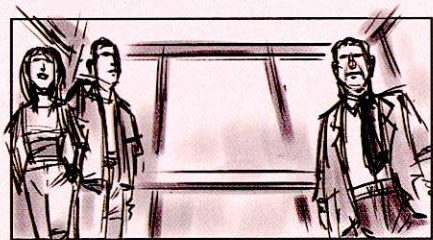
ELEVATOR - TAN SUIT

PAGE: 03

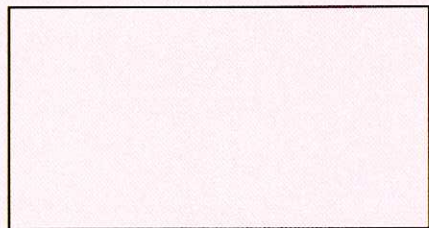
SCENE:

DATE: 9-29-10

REVISED:



LOW ANGLE - DRIVER, IRVING & TAN SUIT IN ELEVATOR



FINAL CHASE

STORYBOARD

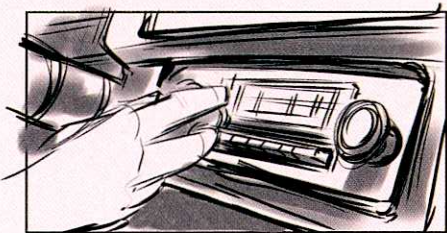
DRIVE

FINAL CHASE

PAGE: 01

SCENE: 165

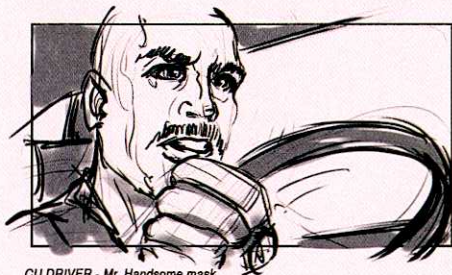
DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED:



DRIVER turns on the radio



angle on DRIVER - wearing Mr. Handsome mask



CU DRIVER - Mr. Handsome mask

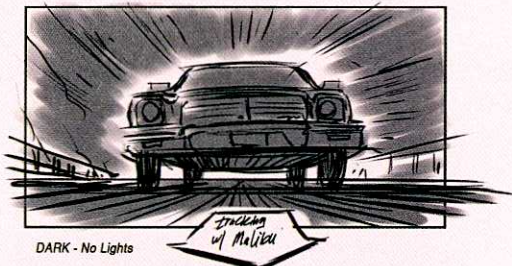
DRIVE

FINAL CHASE

PAGE: 02

SCENE: 165

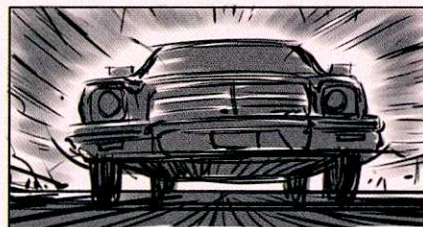
DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED:



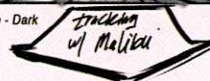
DARK - No Lights



INT MALIBU - following the Lincoln...



Tracking - low angle - Dark

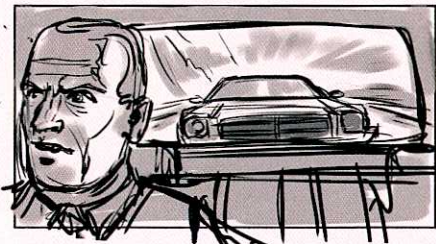


DRIVE

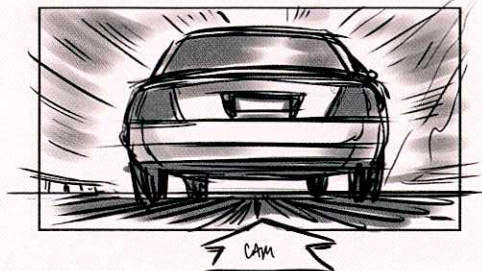
FINAL CHASE PAGE: 03
 SCENE: 165 DATE: 9-01-10
 REVISED:



INT SUV - Nino on phone - empty road behind - 'strobing' in/ out of street lights



CONT'D - Nino looking around - ... next spotlight - suddenly Malibu appears! NO HEADLIGHTS



Malibu POV - Moving in fast on the Lincoln

BLACK
 SPOT
 BLACK
 SPOT
 BLACK
 CHALLENGER
 SUV
 ↓

DRIVE

FINAL CHASE PAGE: 04
 SCENE: 165 DATE: 9-01-10
 REVISED:



Low angle - Malibu overtakes CAMERA



Nino's driver looks in the rr view mirror



Nino driver POV - rr view mirror - nothing...



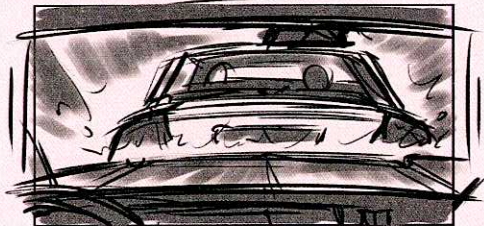
DRIVE

FINAL CHASE

PAGE: 05

SCENE: 165

DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED:



DRIVER POV - he HITS rear of Lincoln!



Nino's driver fights for control



Nino recoils, looking around...

DRIVE

FINAL CHASE

PAGE: 06

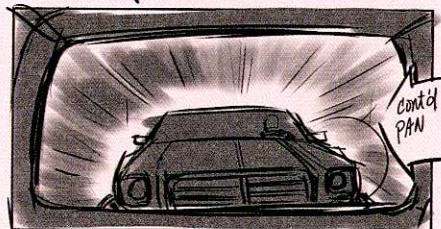
SCENE: 165

DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED:

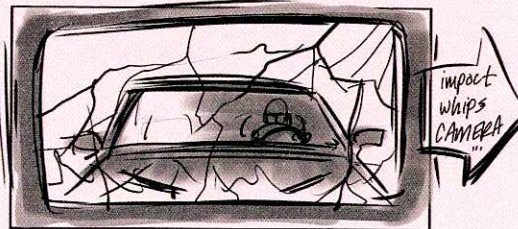


OTS DRIVER -

← PAN BACK TO NINO...



CONT'D - Camera continues around into NINO POV - Malibu coming in fast!



CONT'D - Malibu hits! RR window SHATTERS!

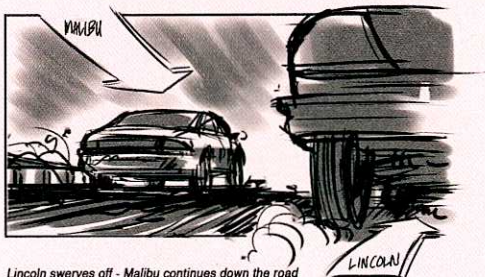
impact whips CAM back...

DRIVE

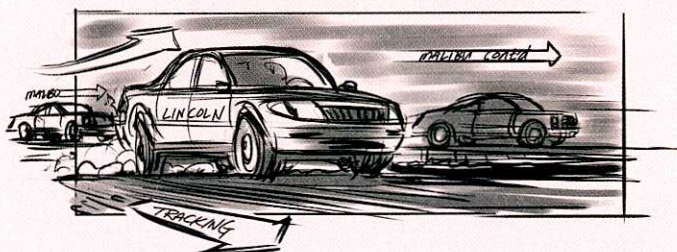
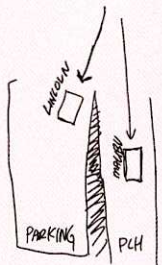
FINAL CHASE PAGE: 07
SCENE: 165 DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED:



INT Lincoln - Nino stunned, his driver shocked



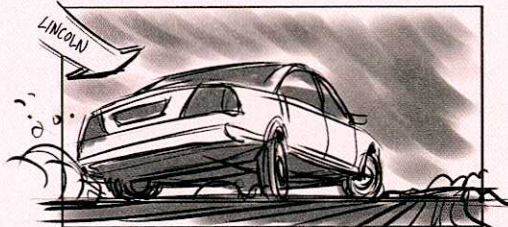
Lincoln swerves off - Malibu continues down the road



Lincoln blasts into the PARKING AREA - Malibu speeds by on PCH in the background

DRIVE

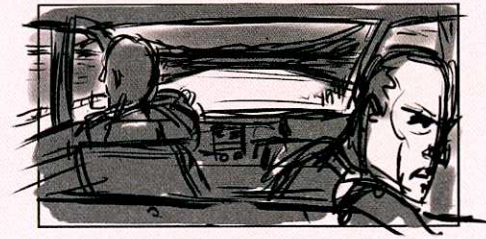
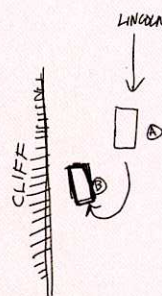
FINAL CHASE PAGE: 08
SCENE: 165 DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED:



Lincoln skids...



CONT'D - ... and powerslides to a stop



INT Lincoln - Nino and driver look around...

DRIVE

FINAL CHASE

PAGE: 09

SCENE: 165

DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED:



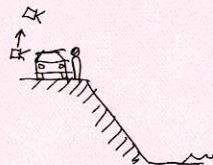
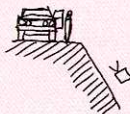
Low angle from cliff - Nino's driver gets out of the car



boom up from Nino & driver looking around...



cont'd - see the cliff and ocean below



DRIVE

FINAL CHASE

PAGE: 10

SCENE: 165

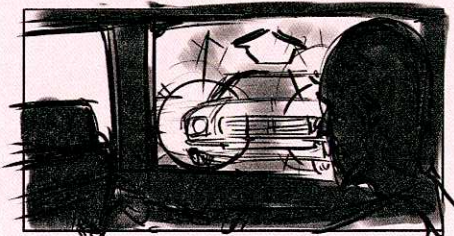
DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED:



reverse angle - over Lincoln - see HEADLIGHTS POP ON IN THE BG



INT Lincoln - Nino reacts to the headlights lighting up the car



reverse angle - int Lincoln - Malibu heading straight for him!

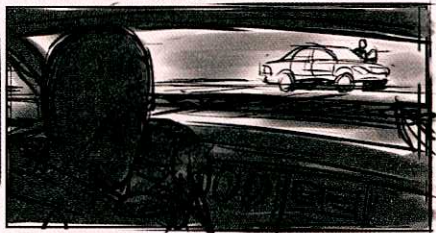
DRIVE

FINAL CHASE

PAGE: 11

SCENE: 165

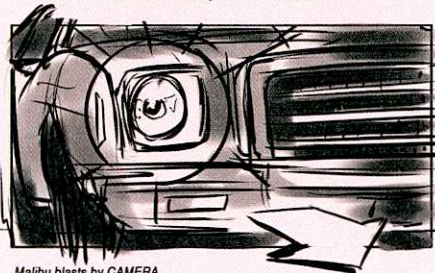
DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED:



INT Malibu - heading in fast for the Lincoln



Over Lincoln - Nino's driver barely has time to react



Malibu blasts by CAMERA

DRIVE

FINAL CHASE

PAGE: 12

SCENE: 165

DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED:



OTS DRIVER - collision course!



CONT'D - SMASH! t-bones the Lincoln



Int Lincoln - Nino slammed hard - windows shatter as the Malibu hits

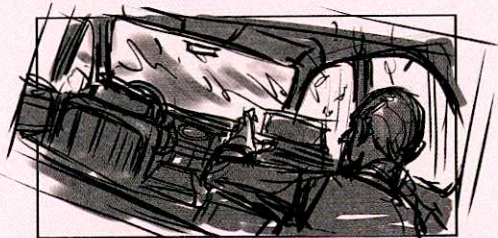
DRIVE

FINAL CHASE

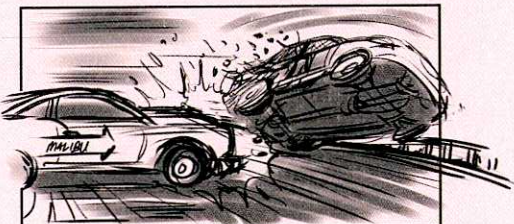
PAGE: 13

SCENE: 165

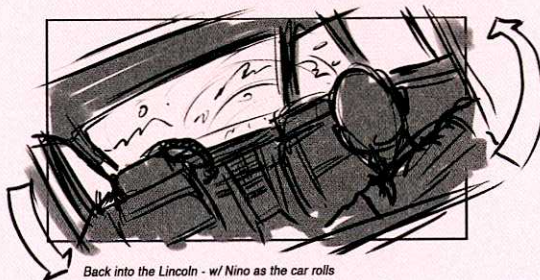
DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED:



INT Lincoln - locked off - car begins to roll



wider on Malibu t-bone the Lincoln



Back into the Lincoln - w/ Nino as the car rolls

DRIVE

FINAL CHASE

PAGE: 14

SCENE: 165

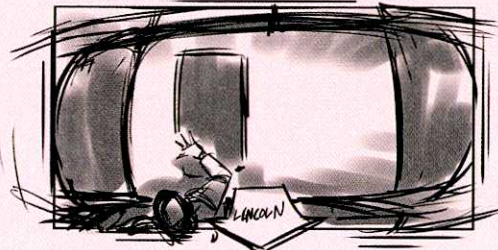
DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED:



INT Malibu - OTS DRIVER - see the Lincoln begin to go over



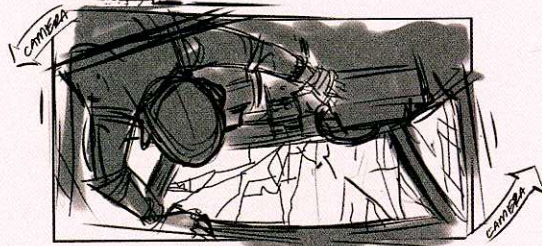
far side - Lincoln flips over onto Nino's driver



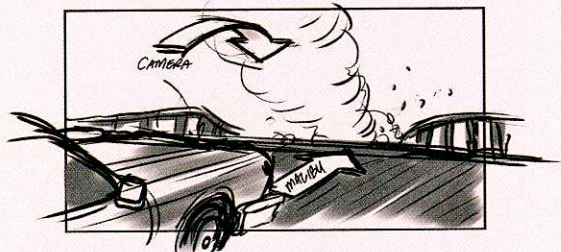
Cont'd - Nino's driver is smashed as the Lincoln rolls over

DRIVE

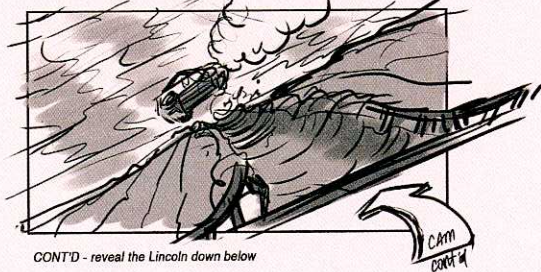
FINAL CHASE PAGE: 15
 SCENE: 165 DATE: 9-01-10
 REVISED:



INT Lincoln - w/ Nino - rolling 360



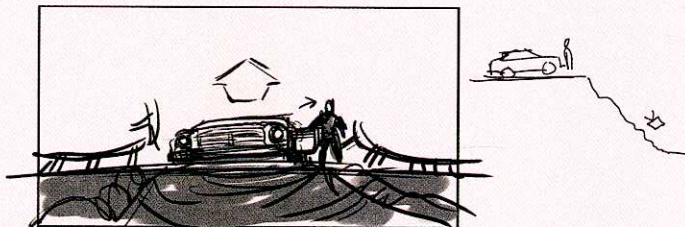
Malibu skids to a stop at the edge - CAM continues over the edge



CONT'D - reveal the Lincoln down below

DRIVE

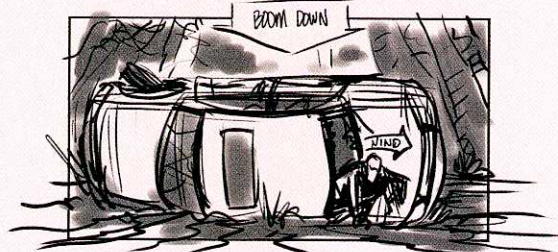
FINAL CHASE PAGE: 16
 SCENE: 165 DATE: 9-01-10
 REVISED:



low angle - DRIVER pulls up to edge & gets out



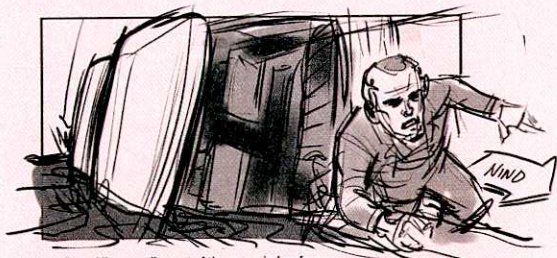
CU on DRIVER



Nino crawls out of the shattered rear window

DRIVE

FINAL CHASE PAGE: 17
DATE: 9-01-10
SCENE: 165 REVISED:



angle on Nino crawling out of the rear window frame



Nino dragging himself out deeper into the ocean



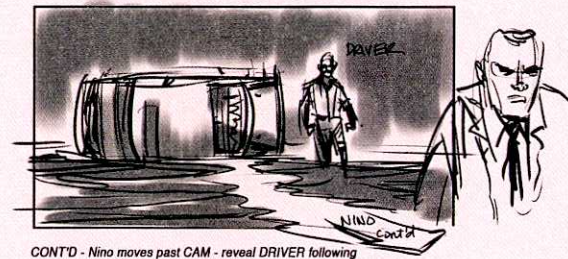
wider on Nino, disoriented, trying to escape into the ocean

DRIVE

FINAL CHASE PAGE: 18
DATE: 9-01-10
SCENE: 165 REVISED:



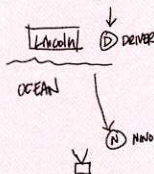
Nino moving to CAM - Lincoln in B.G.



CONT'D - Nino moves past CAM - reveal DRIVER following



Nino fighting against the waves - futile, being pushed back to shore



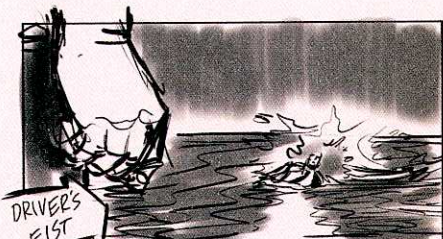
DRIVE

FINAL CHASE

PAGE: 19

SCENE: 165

DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED:



Nino fighting against the waves - rack focus to DRIVER stepping into FG



wide/ low on a menacing DRIVER



Exhausted Nino fighting to get away without success

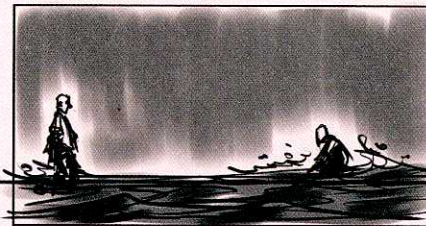
DRIVE

FINAL CHASE

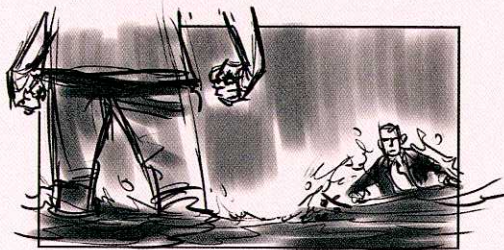
PAGE: 20

SCENE: 165

DATE: 9-01-10
REVISED:



a long moment of Driver and Nino..



Past DRIVER- fists in frame - Nino in the background



reverse angle - Nino trying to back up as DRIVER advances

DRIVE

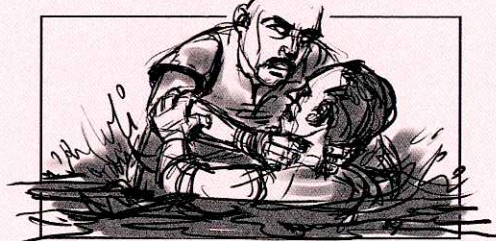
FINAL CHASE PAGE: 21
 SCENE: 165 DATE: 9-01-10
 REVISED:



wide profile on DRIVER advancing



NINO pushing back into frame - while DRIVER advances into frame



DRIVER comes in and strangles NINO!

DRIVE

FINAL CHASE PAGE: 22
 SCENE: 165 DATE: 9-01-10
 REVISED:



Over DRIVER - strangling Nino



DRIVER pushes Nino underwater

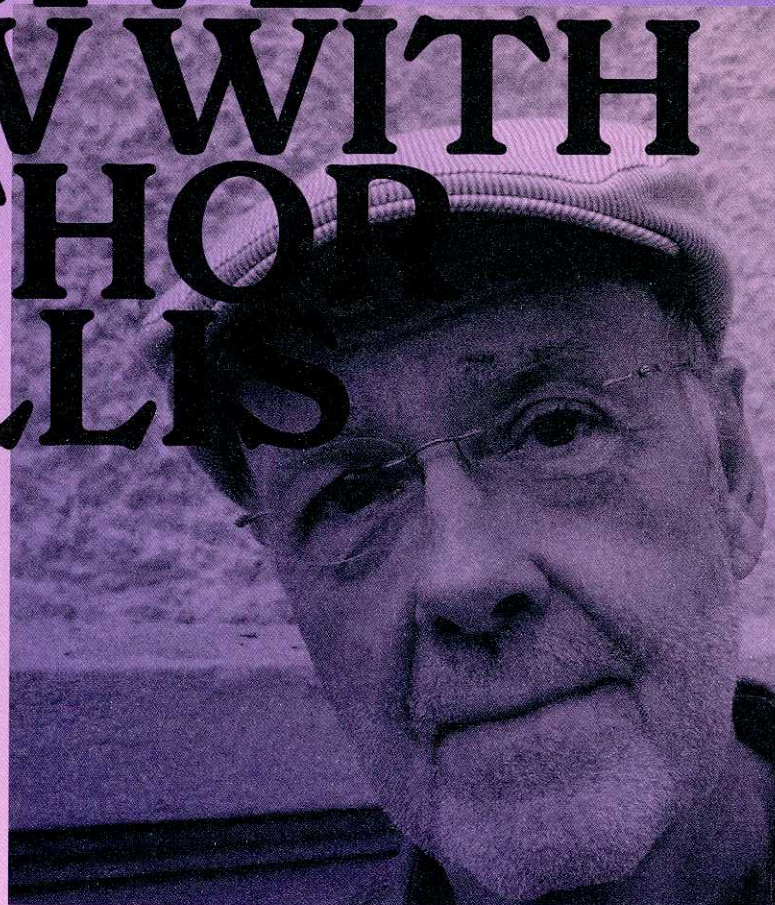


UNDERWATER - Nino is strangled and enveloped in the darkness

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH DRIVE AUTHOR JAMES SALLIS

BY MATTHEW THRIFT

Born in Arkansas, James Sallis is best known for his crime fiction, notably the six novels that make up the New Orleans-set Lew Griffin series. A poet, musician, critic and teacher, Sallis began his literary career in the late 1960s, writing and editing science fiction for *New Worlds* magazine in London. *Drive*, published in 2005, was his tenth novel. A sequel, *Driven*, followed in 2012. He lives in Phoenix, Arizona, the city-stage for both his *Driver* novels.



Can you tell me about the evolution of *Drive*? Was there a specific image or idea that served as its seed?

Most of my novels begin from a visual image. With *Drive*, that's what you see in the opening scene, pretty much as first written. It came to me all at once, and got scribbled onto a page of a legal pad. The rest of the scene, and the novel, came with my asking, 'Who is this? What is he doing here?'

You've said elsewhere that the first page of *Drive* sat in a drawer for a while until you returned to it. What spurred your return?

I've file drawers and envelopes and computer files stuffed with notes, beginnings, sentences, paragraphs. Most come to nothing. That page from the legal pad kept pushing its way back into my consciousness. I'd thought for a long time about writing a contemporary equivalent of all those wonderful old Gold Medal-type paperbacks, something with that muscularity and momentum but with, at the same time, a verticality uncommon to them. And a bit updated, of course. Dennis McMillan gave me the opportunity when he asked for a story for his anthology *Measures of Poison*. The page I'd jotted down years before in New Orleans had everything I wanted. So I sat down to find out where that initial scene would take me.

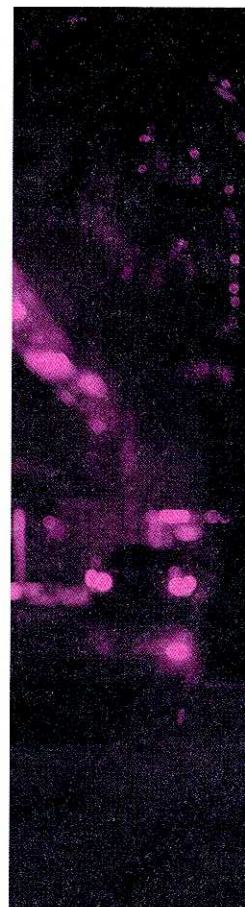
The cover of my copy of *Drive* describes it as 'noir existentialism'. How do you feel about those terms in reference to your work?

As anyone who's followed my reviews and criticism knows, I'm adamantly a non-believer when it comes to labels. They have a shelf life and get used up

pretty fast. Whatever juice 'noir' may have had has been drained away by overuse. Like 'jazz', what it means to me is radically different from what it means to you, or to the lady sitting beside you on the underground. Are the novels 'dark'? Well, yeah – they're serious. Ambitious, if you will. Are they 'existential'? I suppose they are, somewhere down in the sludge from which they came, but does that in any helpful sense describe them, or differentiate them from Camus, from Theodore Sturgeon, from Patricia Highsmith?

Drive splits its time between Los Angeles and Phoenix, where you're a long-time resident. The film takes place entirely in the former and seems to feed off and into the canon of LA noir. Can you talk a little about the qualities of Phoenix as a noir backdrop and the psycho-geographical effects of its purposeful separation from LA in your novel?

Though it's the fifth largest city in the States, Phoenix is, in the Western style, spread out, horizontal rather than vertical; as you move through, it never feels like a city but like a series of small towns conjoined, cells blundering towards something larger. It is, like America itself, a manufactured place, wrested from the desert and from those who lived here before, profoundly multi-racial yet solidly conservative. All the wonderful self-contradictions



of the nation within which it happens.

Did you have any specific literary or cinematic genre antecedents in mind in the early stages, works that *Drive* could perhaps share its DNA with? The Coen brothers get a shout-out in the book, if I recall.

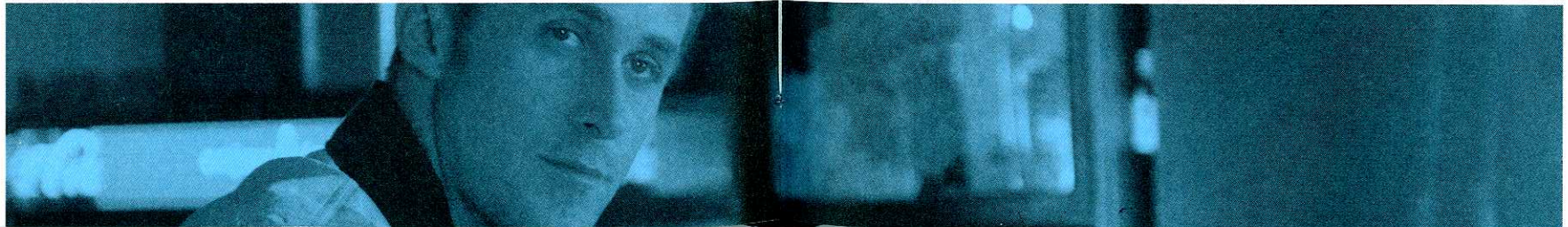
As intimated above, I had firmly in mind those 40s and 50s Gold Medal paperback novels. The dedication to 'three great American writers' might also be a clue. I was brought up on mainstream fiction, Hemingway, Faulkner, Edna St Vincent Millay, Huxley, Steinbeck and their ilk, but the first fiction with which I fell hopelessly in love, age six or seven, was science fiction, so the time I spent with those approved novels and stories got shared with the like of Sturgeon, Heinlein, Andre Norton, C L Moore, and Alfred Bester – and frankly, I didn't see much difference. I developed a great fondness and admiration for working writers, pulpsters, original-paperback guys and gals, people who sat down every day and got the job done, who perhaps had few literary pretensions. *Drive* was conceived as an homage to those writers, as was my critical collection *Difficult Lives*.

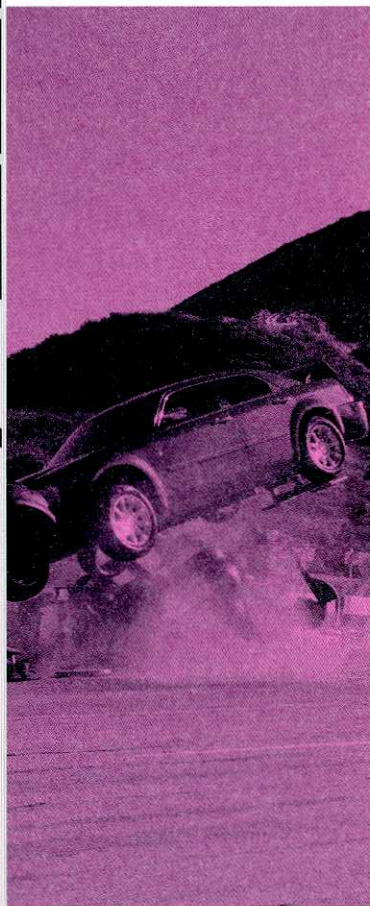
Walter Hill's film *The Driver* is often cited in reference to the film. Was that in any way influential for you too?

Strangely, I'd not seen the movie at the time, and in fact didn't know of it. There were many years when I didn't see movies. First, I had no money. And (as I've also said of the sixties) I missed them since I was stuffed into a small apartment somewhere writing.

The protagonist's name, *Driver*, speaks to his archetypal qualities, but your novel provides a back story that the film largely elides. Can you talk a little about the evolution of *Driver* as a character and the process of balancing questions of archetype and humanity?

The American novel differs from the European model in that it's at heart a romance, centred on the individual vs society rather than the individual finding his or her place in society. Also at its heart is the frontier myth: this tiny patch of civilisation wrested from wilderness or desert. The cowboy rides in from outside, sets things right, and rides off again. *Red Harvest*, *Road House*, *Pale Rider*, James Fenimore Cooper – we're on the same bus, if headed to different stops. To balance or offset this *ladenness*, *Driver* must be as individualised as possible. Like all writing, it's a conjuring trick, you point one way and happen another.





The driving sequences in the novel are incredibly vivid. Was there any specific method to sequencing those? Did you use any visual references, for example?

I read and stole from everything I could find about stunt driving.

Are you a car guy, or did the technical aspects of *Driver's* exacting specifications require research?

I'm lucky if the car starts when I turn the key or push the button. But I have friends who – and books that – know these things.

I love the relationship between cinema and reality that runs through *Drive*, the blurred lines between artifice and realism. There's *Driver's* 'real world' getaway driving held up against his stunt work – both real, but one ostensibly 'fake' – but it also extends into the idea of the remake of the Robert Mitchum picture *Thunder Road* on which he drives and Manny's character having a film made about his life.

Driver has to be real and a myth figure at the same time, and this is one of the great, great strengths of a realist fiction, whether science fiction, fantasy, magical realism, or crime novels, all of so-called 'genre' fiction: these stories tap directly into mythic forms Jung believed hardwired into us; the mythic element is built into the very structure of the narrative, is in fact its underpinning, its exoskeleton. The *Thunder Road* section came fairly late in the revisions, considering the above; it needed to be there. The bit about Manny's movie mirrors that, with another mirroring in my later short story *What You Were Fighting For*.

I'm curious how your work as a poet and musician informs your writing. *Drive* seems to have a wonderful rhythmic quality to it.

I began as a poet and remain so. Language for me is a sensuous thing; it has breath, it has a heartbeat. Internally I hear and feel the rhythms of phrases and sentences and write to match them. Other influences are the compression in storytelling of my favourite music, old time mountain-style, country, and blues – and the fact that all of it is outsider music.

How does getting a novel optioned for film work in practical terms?

You have agents like Vicky Bijur (literary, her own agency) and Steve Fisher at APA (film and TV). And then you have tons of luck.

To what extent, if any, did you have a working relationship with Hossein Amini on the film adaptation?

I had no contact with Hoss or with Nic, though the producers kept me wonderfully apprised, even of casting. I did send Hoss an email after seeing the movie, to thank him. Astonishingly fine script. I was, and remain, in awe.

What's it like, turning your work over to another writer for them to adapt? Was it easy to be philosophical about the inevitable changes an adaptation would incur?

Novelistic and visual vocabularies are quite different; I knew that. Hoss has said that the novel was unlike anything he's usually given to adapt. On the set Nic said the movie was in part my vision and in part his, to which I replied that I hope they play well together. They did, and became best friends.

Were there changes, additions or excisions that you were pleasantly surprised by, that you felt worked for the film in a way they wouldn't have for your novel?

I was pleasantly surprised by everything about the film. The score, the camera work, Hoss's script, every performance. So pleased in fact that I saw the film only once, at the debut. I've mentioned in other interviews that my response is much like that of the aliens in a story by Donald Barthelme, who have sex one time in their lives and spend the remainder remembering it. That viewing was so pure, so special, I wanted to leave it undisturbed.

Did you spend any time on the production itself?

My wife and I were invited to spend a day on the set, which we did. We were

met with unerring kindness, delivered to the producer's tent where as scenes got shot and reshot, we had the chance to speak casually with most of the actors. And as I said above, we attended the LA premiere, complete with an onstage acknowledgment from Nic, walking the red carpet, before- and after-parties...

Was it a pleasant process, something you'd like to be a part of again?

Absolutely – though, everything having been virtually perfect with this experience, I'd superstitiously be nervous. I've been spoiled.

Have you written any screenplays yourself, either originals or adaptations of your other novels?

Put up in Paris for six weeks years ago, I wrote a screenplay for a French director and her producer. It was, like most, never produced. I came to understand that my talent is as a fiction writer, not as scenarist.

Driven is terrific. It really leans into the fatalism, the idea that we can't escape our



true selves. Had you always planned a sequel to *Drive* or did the success of the film accelerate its evolution?

I never imagined I'd write a sequel. Relaying a query from Hollywood, my agent called to ask if I'd considered same. After saying absolutely not, I walked back into my office, typed the title *Driven* and the beginning scene, and had to call Vicky back. She's a wonderful person, and a friend, and didn't laugh.

There's a line in *Driven* that made me laugh, about Manny writing 'a fine piece of cod for some pale Norwegian type who wants to show us what America's all about'. A reference to a certain real-world filmmaker by any chance?

More generic, finally, but I had someone or -ones vaguely in mind, yes.

Have you had any conversations about a possible big screen adaptation of the sequel?

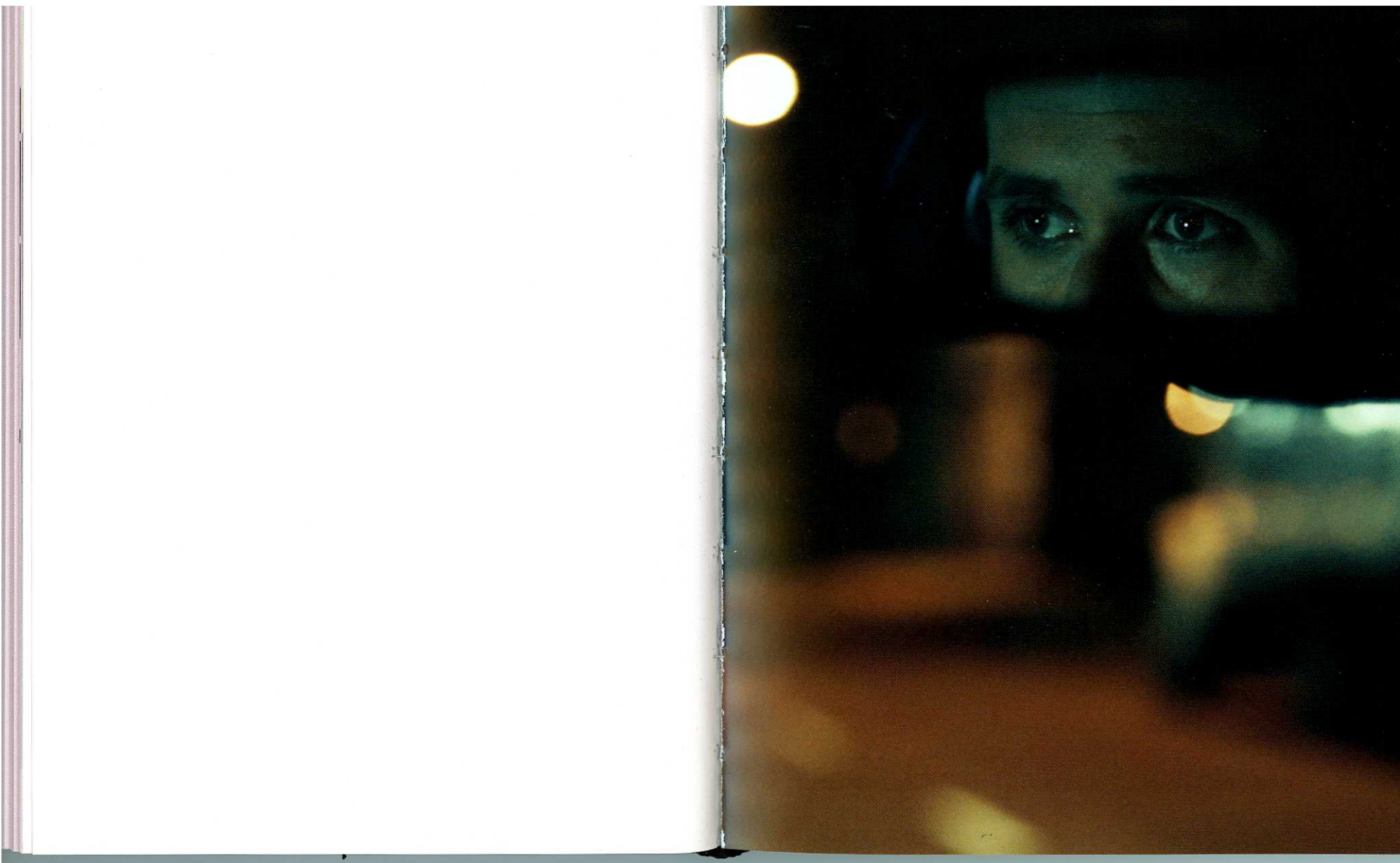
Driven was submitted to Marc Platt's company in manuscript. They passed.

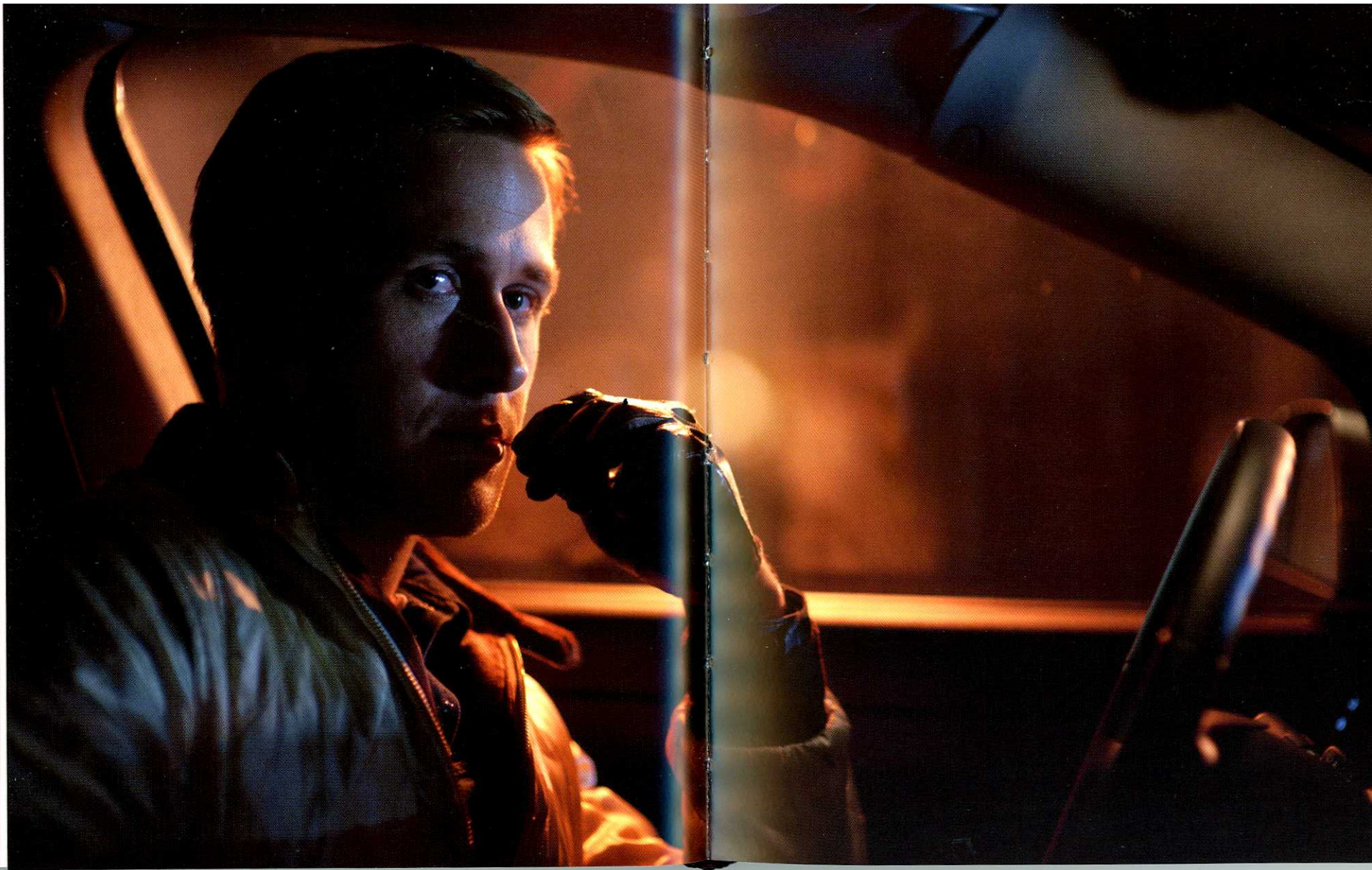
Drive ends with a line about Manny having turned his life into a movie. It seems there's an entire *Drive* cinematic universe there for the making. Do you have any further adventures for *Driver* planned, or has he hung up his keys for now?

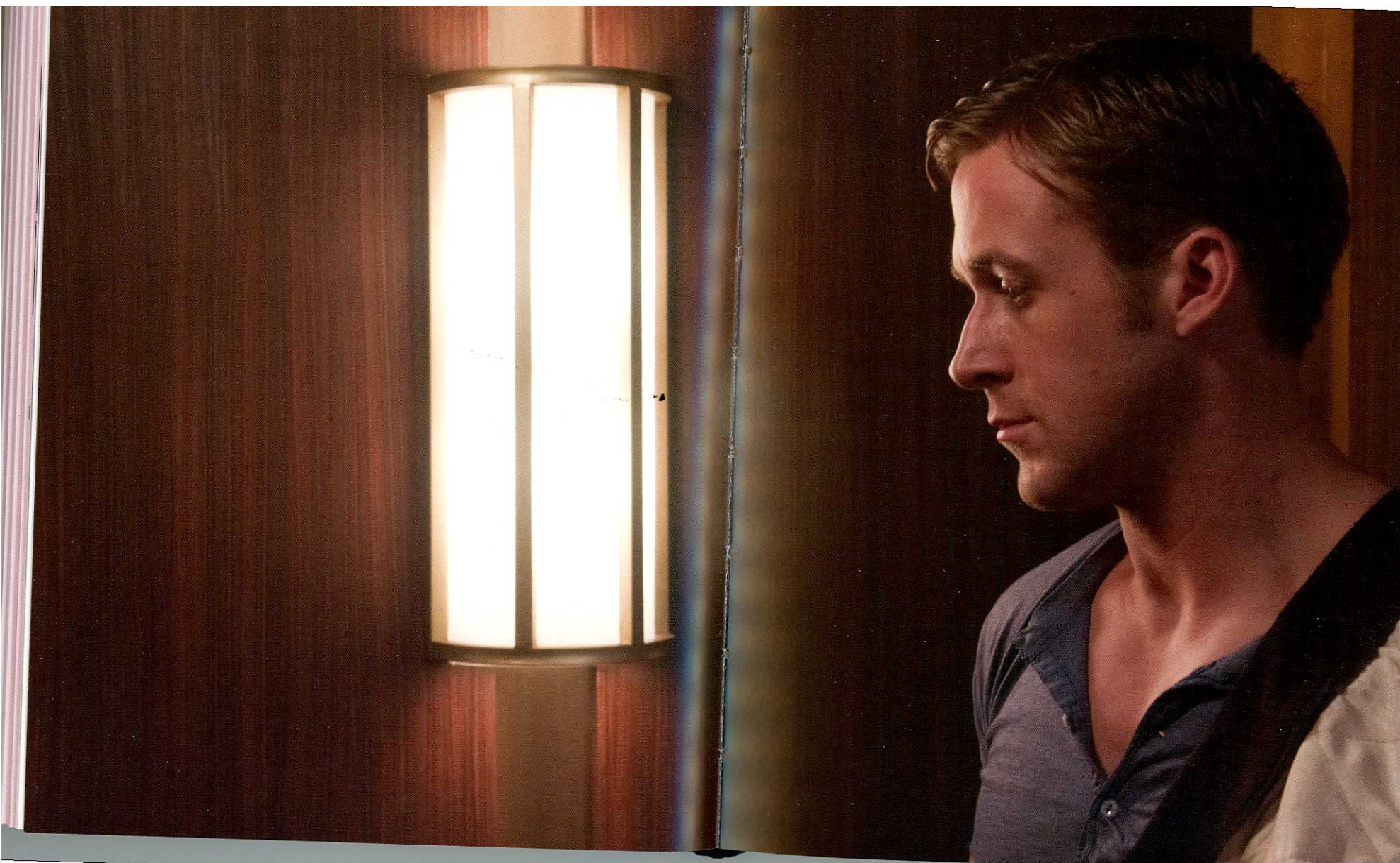
There's a lot of suggestion and limning for further play on the film/reality

structure; but no, I've no further plans to write about *Driver*. In closing, because it pertains to that blurred landscape between film and narrative, I'll mention my short story *What You Were Fighting For*, written for my friend Patrick's anthology *The Highway Kind*. It's told by a young man who meets *Driver* at some point past the end of *Driven*, and who at the story's end sits watching a film – Manny's – about the man he met so long ago.

With many thanks to James Sallis.





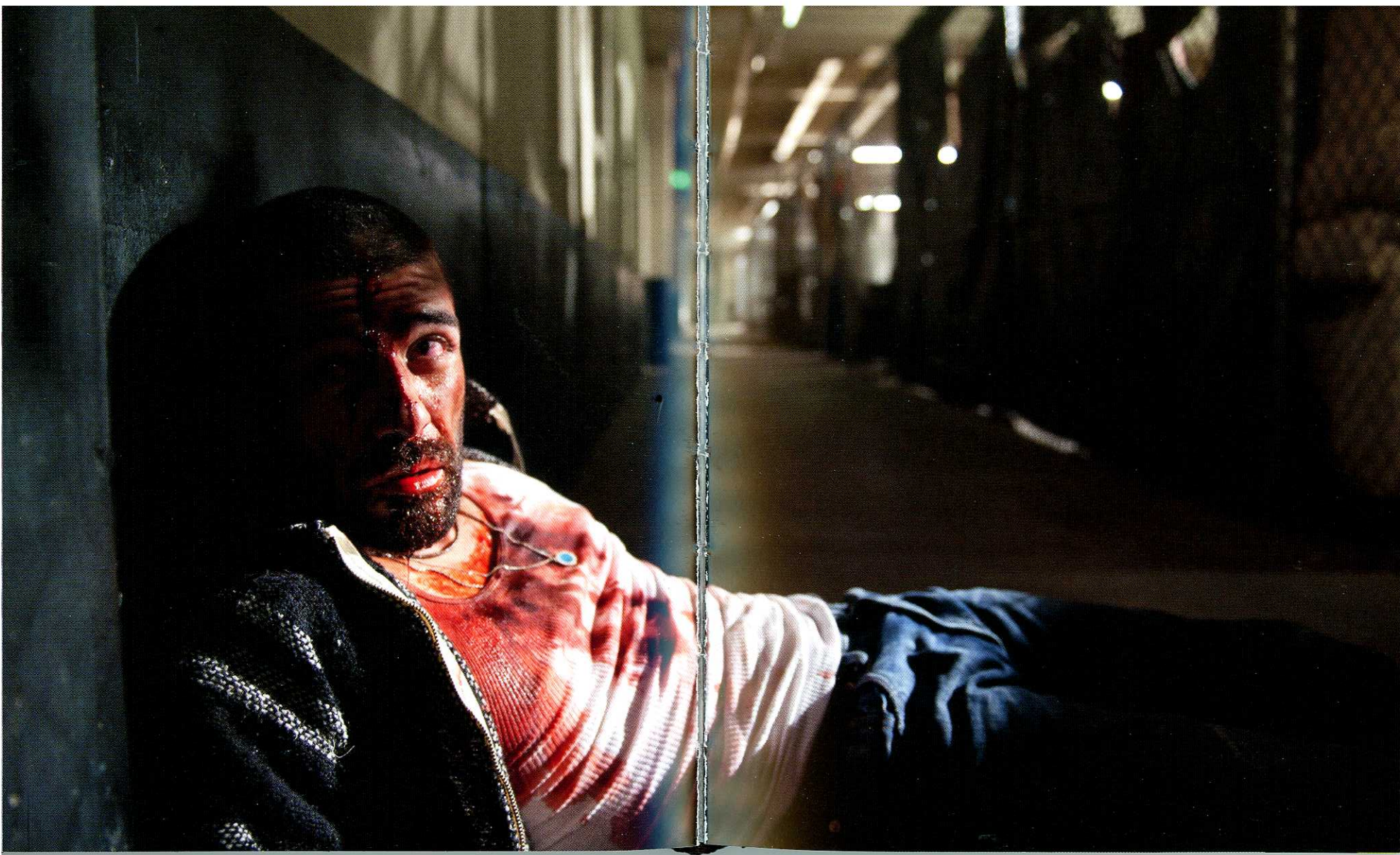




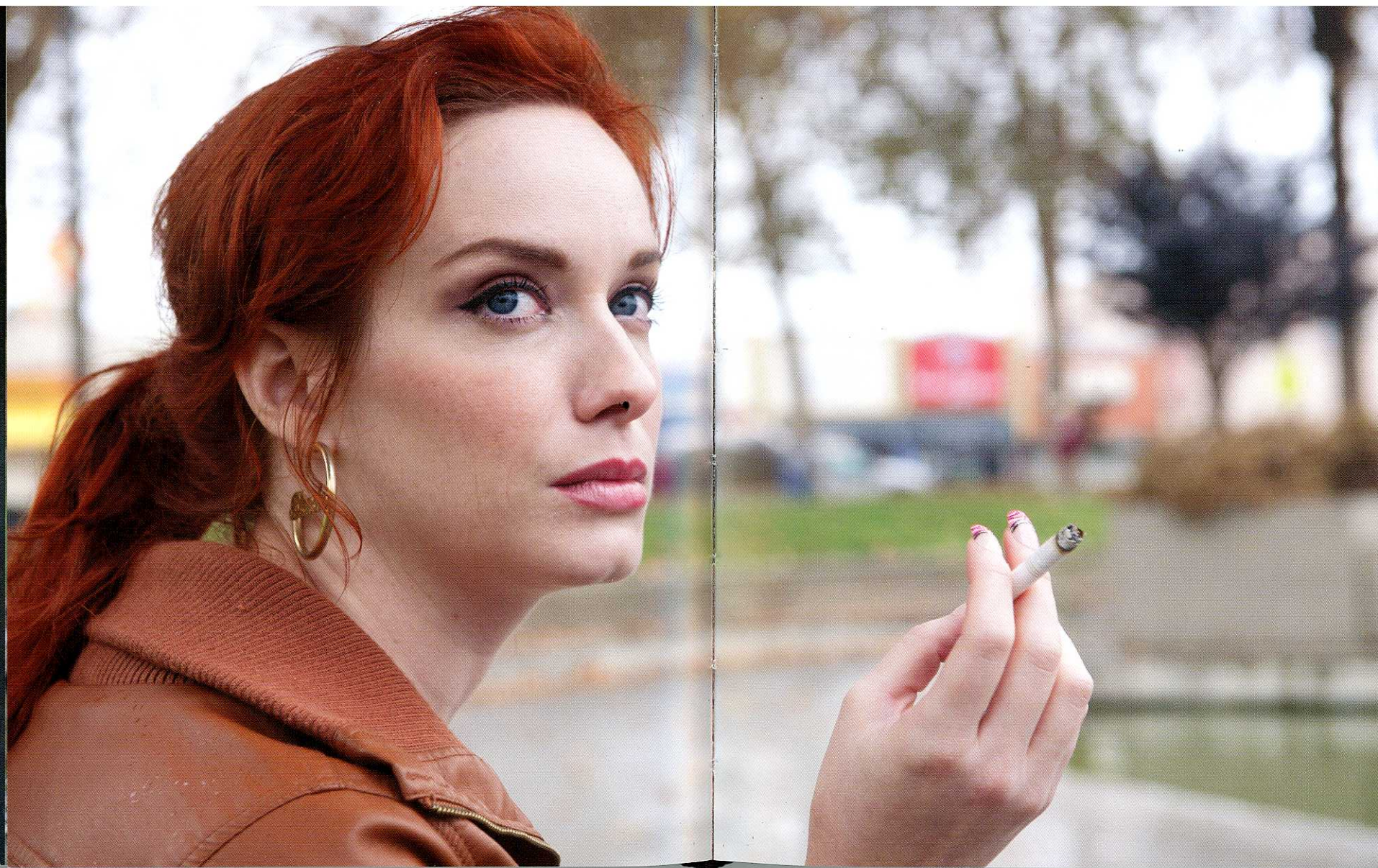










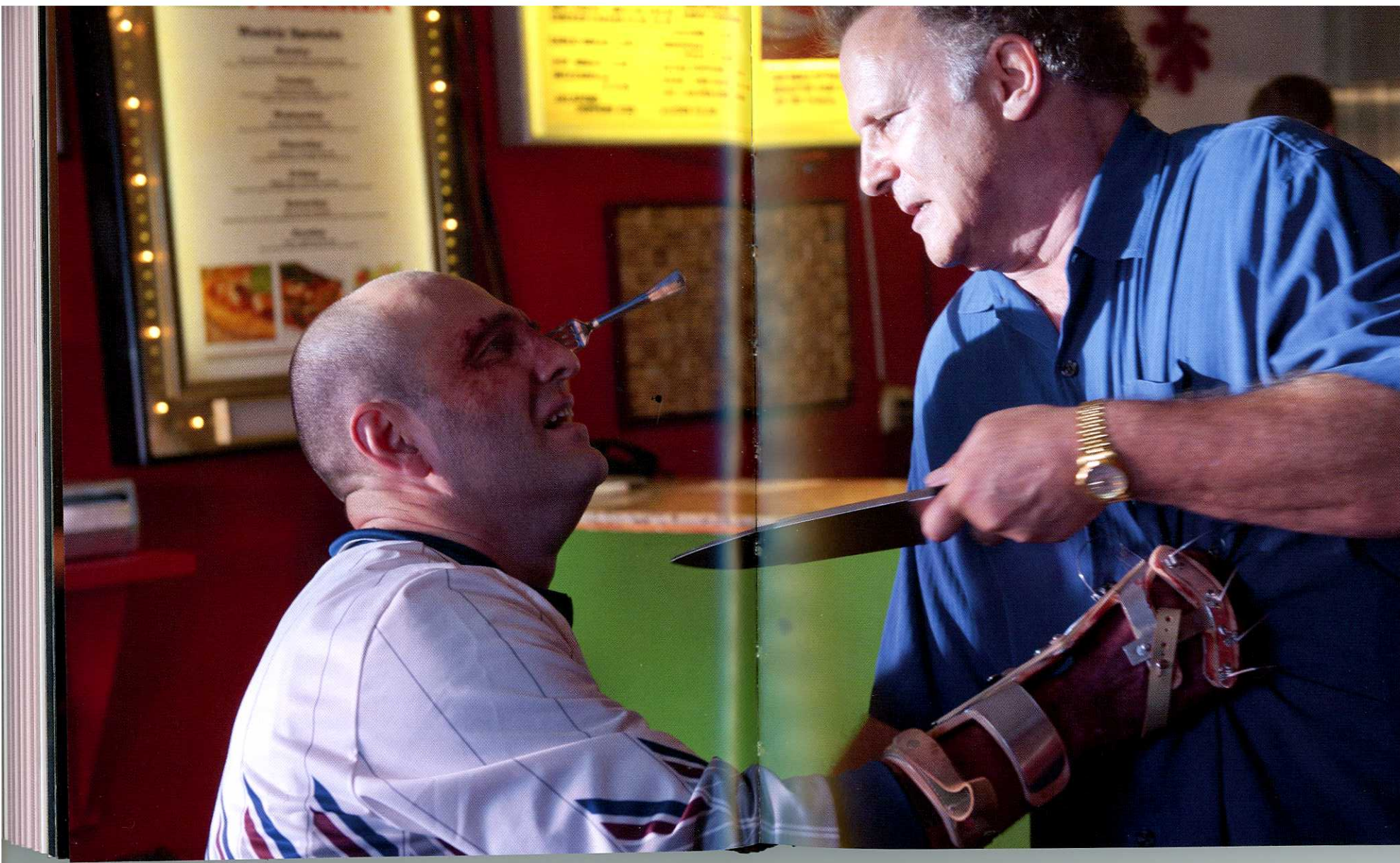






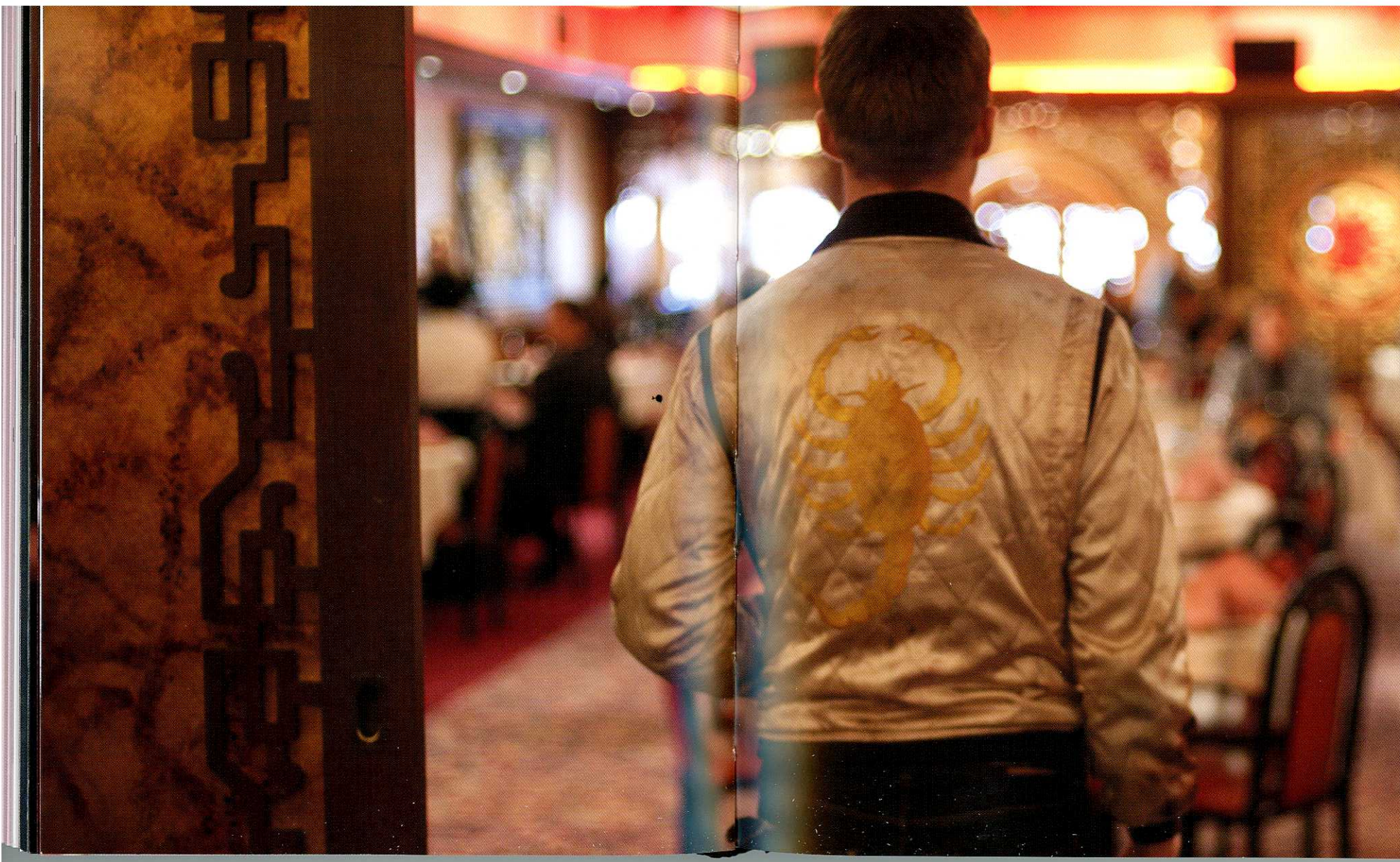














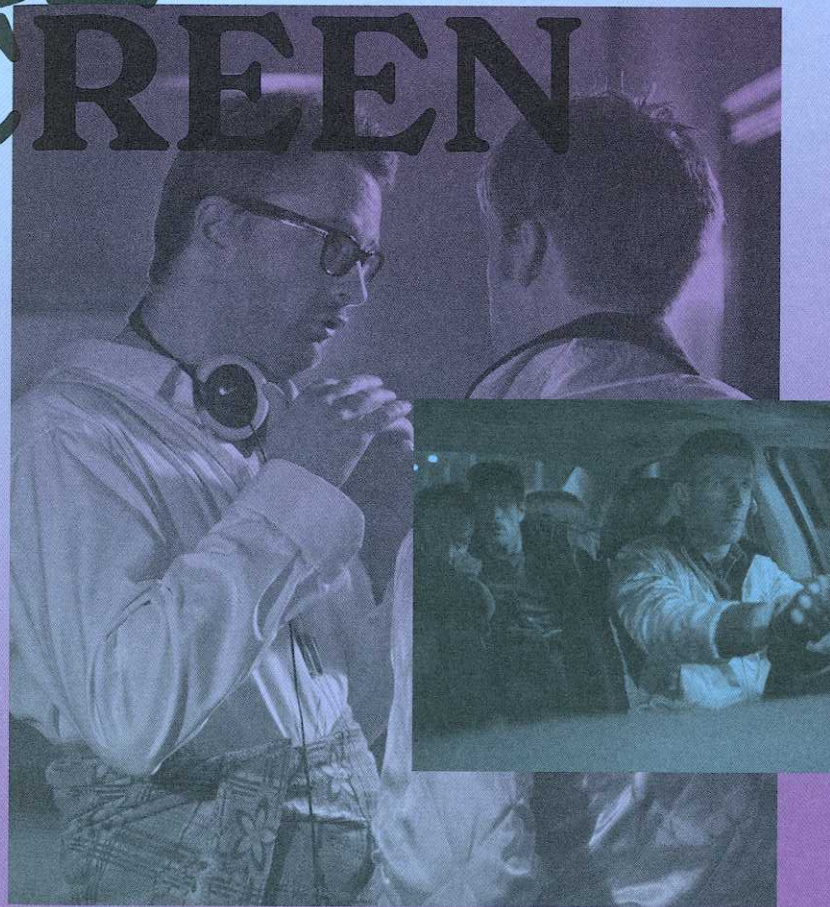


DRIVE: PAGE VERSUS SCREEN

BY SIMON WARD

James Sallis' novel *Drive* was published in 2005. It was extremely well received and underlined Sallis, once again, as one of the greats of contemporary crime writing. It's a quick read, certainly more than a novella but with its briskness, its odd way of dropping the reader into situations that seemed to have started without them, it still feels somewhat like a novella. This is perhaps not surprising, as it was originally expanded from a short story Sallis wrote for the 2002 crime anthology *Measures of Poison*. That short story has grown into a novel, a sequel, a movie adaptation and a host of cinematic imitators. For *Drive*, the relationship between adaptation, inspiration and key references is a difficult one to untangle; the movie is the official adaptation, but the novel only partly serves as its inspiration.

The opening of the movie is justly iconic: when a high-speed chase would normally kick off, Driver instead kills the lights and pulls the car over; the beautiful night-time photography of street-level LA as the chase escalates;



the payoff from the coverage of the basketball game at the nearby Staples Center; the needle-drop for Kavinsky's 'Nightcall'.

None of this is in the book. No opening chase, no aching hip descriptions of LA. The novel opens with the aftermath of a botched robbery, with Blanche (played by Christina Hendricks in the film) and Nino's two enforcers already dead. It's a motel room near Phoenix and Driver is 'watching the pool of blood lap toward him'. From this starting point the novel jumps back in time and continues to flip-flop between past and present throughout. It's an opening right out of film noir and noir fiction: the protagonist slumps down with blood on his hands and wonders how it all came to this – James M Cain would be happy with such a starting point.

DRIVE THE MOVIE
IS A HOT PINK
LOVE LETTER



The book itself is dedicated to Ed McBain, Donald Westlake and Lawrence Sanders and by page 14 there are references to Richard Stark (Westlake again) and George Pelecanos. Aside from being four of the greatest novelists who ever wrote the word 'gun', what these authors share is a muscular, efficient and realistic style (barring some of Westlake's more comic prose) that is certainly akin to *Drive*. The book is no-nonsense and does not have time to open the car window and inhale the breeze on the Pacific Coast Highway.

So if the novel comes from a lineage of crime grandmasters who specialise in real people committing real crimes, where does the film come from? 1980s cinema. The links to *The Driver* (1978), *Thief* (1981), *To Live and Die in LA* (1985) and *8 Million Ways to Die* (1986) have been well documented, as well as the influence of *Miami Vice* (1984–1990), with its swooning night-time drives to perfectly judged music cues. But the film doesn't really have crime on its mind; it's more interested in romance. If cool blood runs through the veins of Sallis' mini masterwork, *Drive* the movie is a hot pink love letter. Whereas there are three dead bodies in three pages in the novel, as soon as the lovelorn-scored opening credits have rolled in the movie, Driver and Irene have their first interaction. It puts them and their love front and centre and it is this relationship that the audience roots for throughout.



The choices Driver makes he makes for Irene.

The book takes an entirely different path. It's Chapter Ten and page 57 before we meet Irene – Irina in the novel. Driver is coming up the stairs with all his belongings when Irina asks if he needs any help. 'Seeing her, a Latina roughly his age, hair like a raven's wing, eyes alight, he wished to hell he did need help.' And that's about as far as their romance goes. Four pages later she explains about Standard and by the next page he's out of prison and 'Most nights, long after Irina and Benicio had gone to bed, Driver and Standard would sit out in the front room watching TV.' On the very next page they are lining up their first robbery together. They do a couple of runs together and become pretty much the best of pals:

*'I ever tell you how much Rina and
Benicio depend on you?'
'I ever tell you what an asshole you are?'
'Nah,' Standard said. 'But that's okay, just
about everybody else has.'
They both laughed.*

Standard asks Driver to watch out for his family if something ever goes wrong on a job, which it of course does. But it isn't a job for Nino and it doesn't kick off a trail of blood and eye-for-an-eye/fork-in-the-eye killings. That all

comes later and is unrelated to Irina. By the time Driver is hunting down Nino, dispatching his hoods one by one, Irina is already dead.

Perhaps the biggest change is Driver himself. In the film he speaks 116 lines, or 891 words, and while he is hardly Chili Palmer in the book, he is far more sociable and communicative, 'hating to be alone', so keeping busy with work and getaway drives. He banters with Standard, meets old friends for drinks and dinner and, to a woman he has only just met in a new apartment building, 'he found himself talking openly about his parents and sensing, in his momentary companion, some deep pain that might never be lessened'. This interior life makes complete sense for the novel, as prose can illustrate thoughts and wonderings that even the best actors can't convey. Sallis' novel seems



'THE CLOSER TO A SILENT MOVIE A FILM CAN BE, THE BETTER'

almost like a writing challenge he set himself: can I make a reader care about this character over a brisk 187 pages and by hiding a real soul in the body of a slick archetype? As the song goes: A real human being / And a real hero.

The decision to make *Driver* more of a cipher on film, more of a silhouette, seems to come from both screenwriter Hossein Amini and director Nicolas Winding Refn. 'The look on the face is the crucial thing,' says Amini. 'I have not found many [scriptwriting] books that go for that approach; they go for the big speech. The closer to a silent movie a film can be, the better.'

Post *Only God Forgives* (2013), Refn began framing *Drive* as part of a shared cinematic story he was creating that also included *Valhalla Rising* (2009) – with its mute hero. The character of One-Eye was essentially being reincarnated in each film, being, as Refn said, a 'mythological creature that has a mysterious past but cannot relate to reality because he's heightened and he's pure fetish'. He would in later years say that the character would next surface in a planned Tokyo spy movie called *The Avenging Silence*.

This taciturn, almost super-hero is all Refn, with shades of it also turning up in his TV series *Too Old to Die Young* (2019) and it is fascinating to watch a filmmaker co-opt a character created by someone else and rework it, own it, in a very esoteric cinematic career.

Refn may be continuing with his version of *Driver* in other forms but Sallis will always have his as well and indeed did continue it by publishing the sequel *Driven* in 2012. It is again a grounded story for *Driver*, our hero who comes from an abusive father and broken home and won prizes in his youth for memorising scripture. The hard, unsparing adventures of the ex-stunt driver would seem to have more in common onscreen with a film such as *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* (2007), with its small-time crimes but real consequences. A drama, in other words, whereas Amini, Gosling and Refn saw in *Drive* the potential to make a neon noir fantasy.

Despite the vastly different approaches to plot, chronology and tone there is some connective tissue between the novel and movie. Bryan Cranston's loveable sad sack Shannon is a



combination of several characters from the page, including Doc, who gets a more prominent role in the book compared with the cameo-ing Russ Tamblyn onscreen. In the novel it is Driver who has a prized razor from his dad, which the film twists and references by giving Bernie Rose (who doesn't appear in the novel until page 143, Chapter 26) a case of immaculately preserved cut-throats. Bernie's favourite Chinese restaurant is reminiscent of the final confrontation between him and Driver in the movie. There also seems to be European flavour infecting both versions, with an oddness and existentialism about the book that brings Jean-Patrick Manchette to mind, whilst the film has more in common with Euro storytelling and risk-taking than any Hollywood crime thriller.

There is a hyper-reality about the film that has taken some of the key beats and ideas of the novel and turned the soundtrack volume way up. This is the case with the violence. The most brutal scene in the book details the motel attack, as Driver 'picked up a piece of the jagged glass and threw. It hit the man full on in the forehead. Pink flesh flowered there, blood poured into the man's eyes, and he dropped the shotgun'. This is colourful enough but not near the crimes of passion Ryan Gosling commits onscreen – which Amini admits was what he brought to the story and how he adapted it into something he wanted to write for the screen:

'With *Drive* there is something about that shy type of... the two sides we all have, you can tap into that. I'm quite a shy, prefer to stay in the background person so *Drive* becomes my own fantasy – what if I could drive a car really well and stomp on people's heads.'

It works like any good adaptation should, by understanding that a film and a novel are different things and what works for one would not work for the other. It would be hard to make Driver's scorpion jacket sound cool on the page, whereas on the screen it fits as snugly as driving gloves.

Simon Ward is a writer of both fiction and non-fiction. His books include *The Art and Making of Alien: Covenant*, *Aliens: The Set Photography*, *Okja: The Art and Making of the Film* and *Making Moon: A British Sci-Fi Cult Classic*. He also wrote the introduction to *Modesty Blaise: The Grim Joker* and has provided text and other materials for numerous Blu-rays.

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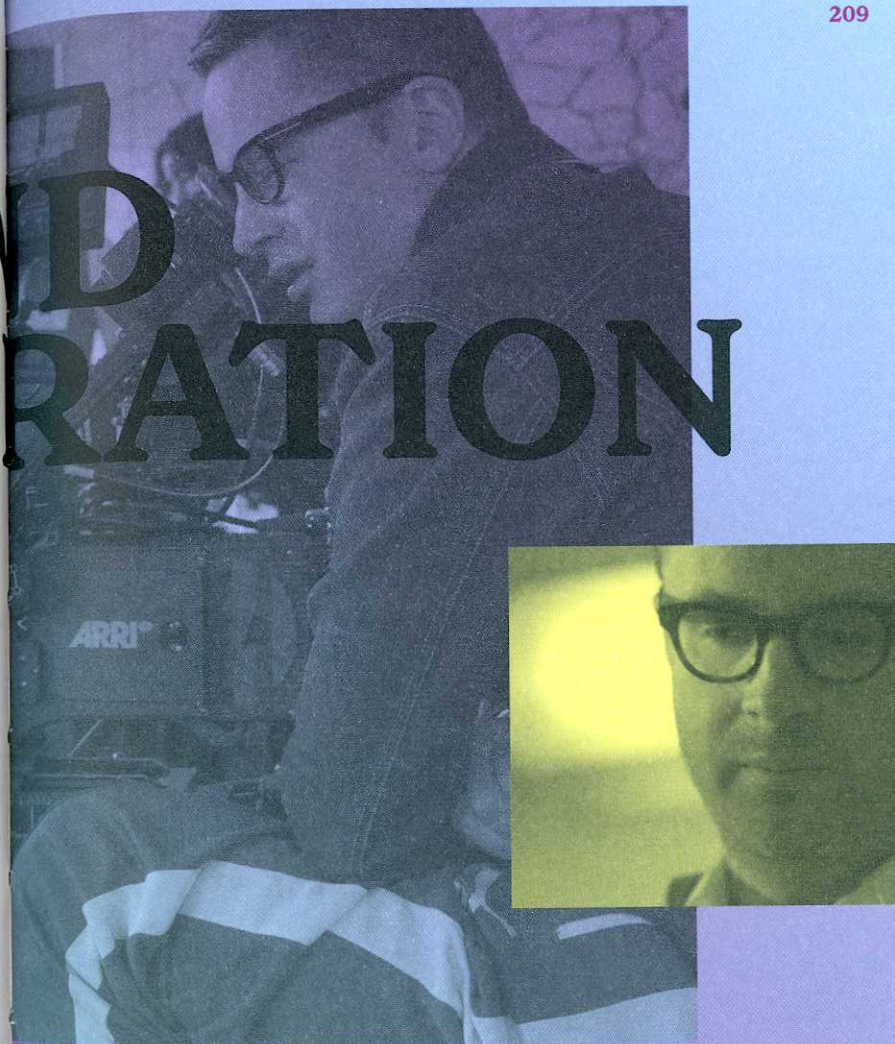
MUSIC, SOUND AND COLLABORATION IN DRIVE

BY THOMAS JOSEPH WATSON

'I can only write a movie when I know what it's gonna sound like'

– Nicolas Winding Refn

Whether it is the inclusion of The Pet Shop Boys, New Order and The Walker Brothers underpinning the violent horrors in *Bronson* (2008) or the Einstürzende Neubauten influenced Industrial-noise soundscapes in *Valhalla Rising* (2009), the centrality of music and sound as it is melded to the cinematic image has always been of paramount importance in the cinema of Nicolas Winding Refn. Marking an aesthetic shift away from the Nordic realism and authenticity that characterised *Pusher* (1996), it was *Bronson* that first





'I DRIVE.
THAT'S WHAT I DO.
ALL I DO'

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displayed the sustained influence of opera, theatre and pop music that has continued to inform Refn's oeuvre.'

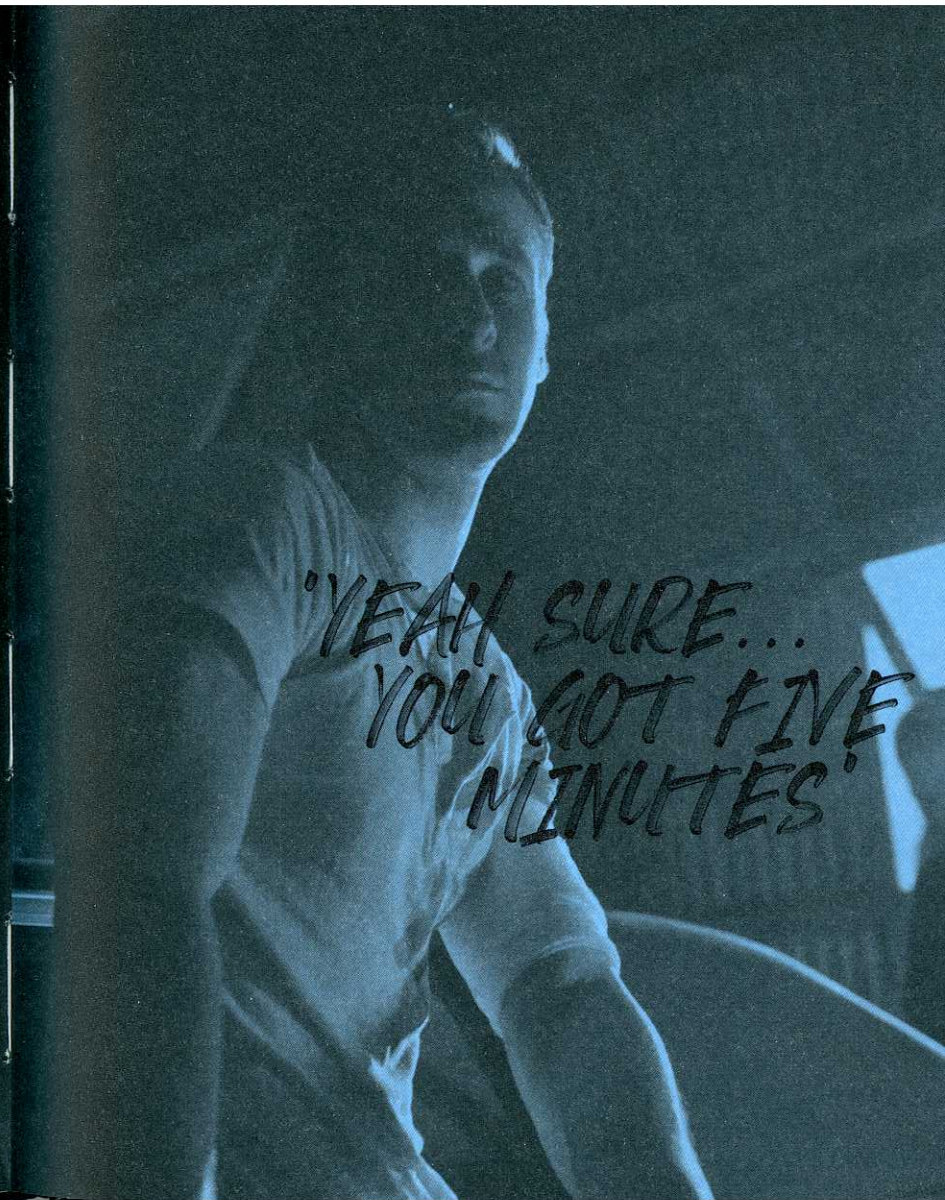
In an interview with BAFTA in 2013, editor Mat Newman underscored the vital confluence between music, sound and image when speaking to his experiences working on *Drive*.⁶ Recounting one of the first conversations he had with Refn and star Ryan Gosling, Newman asserts, 'When I arrived on the first day, Nic and Ryan said, "show us your iTunes library".⁷ Indeed, it was the music that the group listened to within the first few days of their meeting which cemented the look and feel of the film, with the Kavinsky title track 'Nightcall' affirming Refn's vision for his neon-noir art-exploitation thriller. The film's prologue is illustrative of these ideas.

As the neon pink opening credits fade to black, and with the final title card signalling the authorial stamp of 'a Nicolas Winding Refn film', the prologue of *Drive* begins, and the pulsating heartbeat and sirens of a late-night Los Angeles can be felt emanating across the film's soundtrack. As Driver stands with his back to a sharpie scrawled map of downtown LA, surveying the distant lights of the city skyline, his narration is accompanied by the urgent, escalating synth bass of the Chromatics' apt 'Tick of the Clock'.⁸ As the camera sweeps across a soon to be vacated desolate apartment, Driver explains to both us and his client:

'There's a hundred thousand streets in this city. You don't need to know the route. You give me a time and a place; I give you a five-minute window. Anything happens in that five minutes and I'm yours, no matter what. Anything happens a minute either side of that and you're on your own. You understand? Good, and you won't be able to reach me on this phone again.'

After collecting the keys for a suitably modified Chevy Impala ('the most popular car in the state of California...no one will be looking at you'), Driver pulls up outside the location of the film's first heist. Affixing a watch to the Chevy's steering wheel to begin his aforementioned requisite five-minutes, the 'Tick of the Clock' on the film's soundtrack literally becomes a ticking clock used to evade capture, demonstrative of Refn's ability to deftly combine both music and layers of diegetic sound to heighten the suspenseful action on screen.

The sequence is without any dialogue other than what is communicated across the police scanner and the Impala's radio (Driver monitoring the final stages of a basketball game that will later be used as cover for him to successfully abandon his vehicle at the Staples Center). Harking back to the James Sallis source material, the taciturn Driver fulfils his obligation; 'I Drive. That's what I do. All I do.' Again, as the screen fades to black, the sudden



"YEAH SURE...
YOU GOT FIVE
MINUTES"

burst of Kavinsky's 'Nightcall' punctuates the soundtrack and we descend once again with Driver into the late-night Los Angeles skyline. In this eight-minute prologue, it is the use of sound, music and silence that foreshadows the expression of emotion throughout the remainder of the film.

'Because I'm a fetish filmmaker, I use music to enhance emotions, to come up with images of what I would like to see.'^{iv}

If the prologue signifies escalating tension through the use of music and sound, Refn is also able to harness this confluence to create a sense of contrast in the developing love story between Driver and Irene (Carey Mulligan) in the absence of her imprisoned husband Standard (Oscar Isaac). Both the use of scoring and soundtrack converge during the tender moments of this relationship, and it is the Cliff Martinez mournful motif of 'I Drive' that is used during their initial 'courtship'. In a sequence where Irene's car breaks down as she is collecting groceries, she stops by the garage where Driver works with his employer, accomplice and friend Shannon (Bryan Cranston).^v Shannon offers Driver's services in order to take Irene and her son home, to which Driver replies, 'Yeah sure... you got five minutes' (in a direct inversion of his own five-minute rule). As they drive around the city and off into the LA River, the College & Electric Youth song 'A Real Hero' begins to play, situating Driver as the protector of Irene and her son Benicio (Driver taking his surrogate family home and remaining in silence with them until the song fades out from the soundtrack). Originally conceived as a tribute to airline captain Chesley Burnett 'Sully' Sullenberger, who really did save the 'one-hundred fifty-five people on board... from the slowly sinking ship', the refrain of the song can also be heard fading into the final sequence of the film, getting louder as Driver is

revived close to death. The final images of the film, Driver leaving Irene knocking on his vacant apartment door as he escapes into the night, is a poignant reminder that they can never be together and that he has sacrificed his chance at stability to ensure her safety, remaining 'a real human being, and a real hero'.

In reference to his collections of records, global exploitation films and related ephemera, Refn is a self-confessed fetishist and has linked this sensibility to an 'ability to match music to cinematic image in daring, oppositional and often unconventional ways'.^{vi} With this sentiment often comes graphic depictions of excessive, visceral, extreme violence that are often matched with beautiful, elegiac, ethereal soundscapes. The use of music and sound is intrinsic to the film's narrative, underpinning both the darkness of the film's violence alongside the light of the film's more tender moments. This is reinforced in Refn's own conception of the film as a dark fantasy. In an evocation of Grimm's *Fairy Tales*, Refn has remarked how the film is one about the 'idea of higher love', and that 'when the tables are turned, and it's time for the villains to be punished... it's always very visceral, very extreme'.^{vii}

**'I USE MUSIC TO
ENHANCE EMOTIONS'**



To this end, there are two main sequences of extreme violence that are accentuated through the use of music and sound. The first is a heist gone wrong as Driver is double-crossed and left to watch helplessly as Standard is gunned down. At approximately one hour into the film's run time, *After the Chase*,²⁶ the opening three pages of the James Sallis novel are transformed by Refn into images of the most brutal, blood-soaked cinematic violence. As Sallis writes, 'The blood was coming from the woman... Blanche's shoulders lay across the bathroom door's threshold. Not much of her head left in there: he knew that.' Blanche (Christina Hendricks) stands as the only other woman in the narrative, and in ultra-slow motion, we see her head eviscerated by a shotgun blast in the most graphic detail.

Up until this point, the sequence had been shrouded in an eerie silence, and it is the shotgun blast that results in a dampening of diegetic sound as we then adjust our hearing in close proximity to Driver. The frantic violence of the sequence, the lasting image of Driver standing blood-splattered in a motel doorway, then gives way to the sequence entitled the 'Wrong Floor', also known affectionately as 'the face stomping sequence'.²⁷ Rather than focusing here on the tender kiss shared between Driver and Irene (this is noted in Alison Taylor's accompanying essay, *Scorpion Rising*), the shift between the plaintive score of Cliff Martinez into the Gaspar Noé inflected head-crushing sequence is worthy of particular attention. Film academic Lisa Coulthard has discussed the work of sound editor Lon Bender in relation to this scene:

'it is not merely the sounds of the impacts that construct the scene's violent effect but the overlaid and amplified sound of Driver's breathing and spittle that comes to the foreground of the scene:

"Rather than play the scene for more and more gore, we brought it back inside his head..."²⁸

Totalling at just over 40 seconds of screen time, Driver wrestles Irene's would-be assailant to the floor and stomps on his head 17 times, the camera momentarily focusing on Irene as she stares on in shock and disbelief. Again, it is the confluence of image and sound that holds the most effect here and it is more about the violence that is unseen, but certainly not unheard.

The *Drive* soundtrack has had an afterlife of its own, divorced from the immediate context of the film, and has been released in several special edition formats across multiple record labels, including Invada, Lakeshore Records and Mondo. Indeed, amidst a marked revival of 1980s themed Synthwave and the renewed career of genre stalwart John Carpenter (evidenced through his *Lost Themes* projects with Sacred Bones Records), the Neon-Noir soundtrack of *Drive* has become a mainstay of popular culture. Given this apparent success, the film was re-scored by former Radio 1 presenter Zane Lowe for television broadcast in 2014, a project that was considered by Refn to be a high form of flattery. The result was the curation of an alternative soundtrack featuring songs from popular artists and groups, including Chvrches, Bastille, The 1975 and Bring Me The Horizon.

Speaking to the material fetishisation of Refn himself, the cultish aura and collectability of *Drive* has not gone unnoticed by the director and has extended into other film projects and contiguous musical endeavours. Refn has collaborated with the Californian-based label *Milan Records*, lending his name to a series of albums under the 'Nicolas Winding Refn

Presents' series (including the collectable LP soundtracks for *IT Follows* [Disasterpiece, 2014], *Oldboy* [Cho Young-Wuk, 2014], *The Terminator* [Brad Fiedel, 2015], *Robocop* [Basil Poledouris, 2015] and *Akira* [Geinoh Yamashirogumi, 2017]). In addition to these re-released soundtracks, Refn has also released compilation albums inspired by his work, perhaps most notably *The Wicked Die Young* (2017) as an adjacent soundtrack album to *The Neon Demon* (2016). The confluence between music, sound and cinema is something that evidently extends beyond the film itself, and with his recent forays into longform television drama via *Too Old To Die Young*, and with his continued collaborations with composer Cliff Martinez and editor Mat Newman, the journey initiated in *Drive* shows no signs of slowing down.

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¹ The UK quad poster for *Branson* promoted the film as 'A Clockwork Orange for the 21st Century'.

² Although Newman has worked alongside Refn since the 2007 episode of *Miss Marple: Nemesis*, it was with *Drive* in 2011 that the director and editor became a triumvirate with the inclusion of composer Cliff Martinez (Refn

referring to the group as the incestuous, three-headed monster).

³ This track is taken from the album *Night Drive* (2007) and marks the second collaboration between Refn and programmer Johnny Jewel, the first of which was the use of Glass Candy's *Digital Versicolor* in *Branson* (2008). Jewel, alongside Nat Walker of the Chromatics, was originally tasked with scoring the early rough edits of *Drive* but was later replaced with future Refn collaborator Cliff Martinez (with whom Refn has worked with ever since on *Only God Forgives* [2013], *The Neon Demon* [2016] and *Too Old To Die Young* [2019]). Paying homage to the compositions of John Carpenter and Goblin's Claudio Simonetti, Jewel and Walker later released their abandoned *Drive* project as the duo *Symmetry*. The album, *Themes from an Imaginary Film* (2012), is sonically and aesthetically linked to *Drive* through a sustained focus on synthesizers and sequencers alongside the album's artwork of a car interior and speedometer. Jewel would also go on to score Ryan Gosling's Refn-esque directorial debut *Lost River* (2014).

⁴ Randall Roberts (2011) 'Cliff Martinez scores a strange success with *Drive*', *Los Angeles Times*.
<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/la-ca-cliff-martinez-20111016-story.html>

⁵ Shannon, as a surrogate father figure, is the only person to bestow another sense of identity on Driver as he constantly refers to him as 'the kid'.

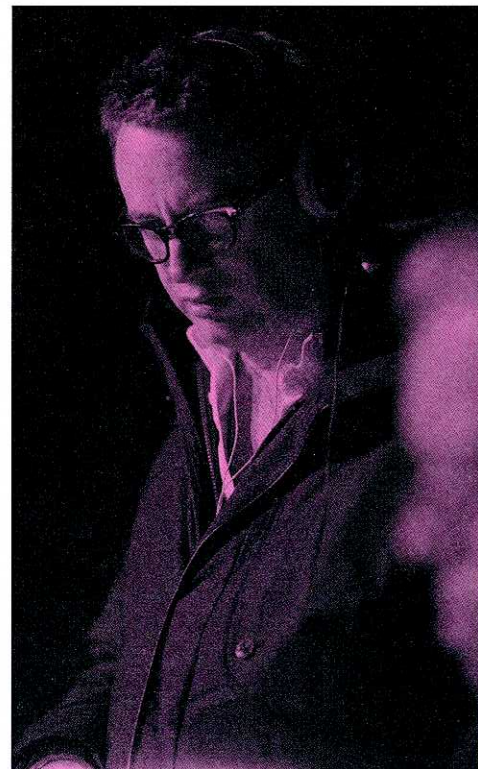
⁶ Elizabeth Aubrey (2017) 'Film should become like music – uncontrollable': DIS Meets Nicolas Winding Refn', *Drowned in Sound*.
https://drownedinsound.com/in_depth/4151016-film-should-become-like-music-uncontrollable---dis-meets-nicolas-winding-refn

⁷ Mark Olsen (2017) 'Nicolas Winding Refn on *Drive*'s Graphic Violence, His Hollywood Experience, and Albert Brooks' *Volcano of Emotions*', *Vulture*.
https://www.vulture.com/2011/09/nicolas_winding_refn_1.html

⁸ *After the Chase* is a reference to the Cliff Martinez track of the same name.

* As Daniel Engber (2012) attests, 'no scene in *Drive* offers a more potent and precise soundtrack for brutality'. 'The Sounds of Violence', *Slate Magazine*. <https://slate.com/culture/2012/02/drive-the-sound-editing-in-the-elevator-stomping-scene.html>

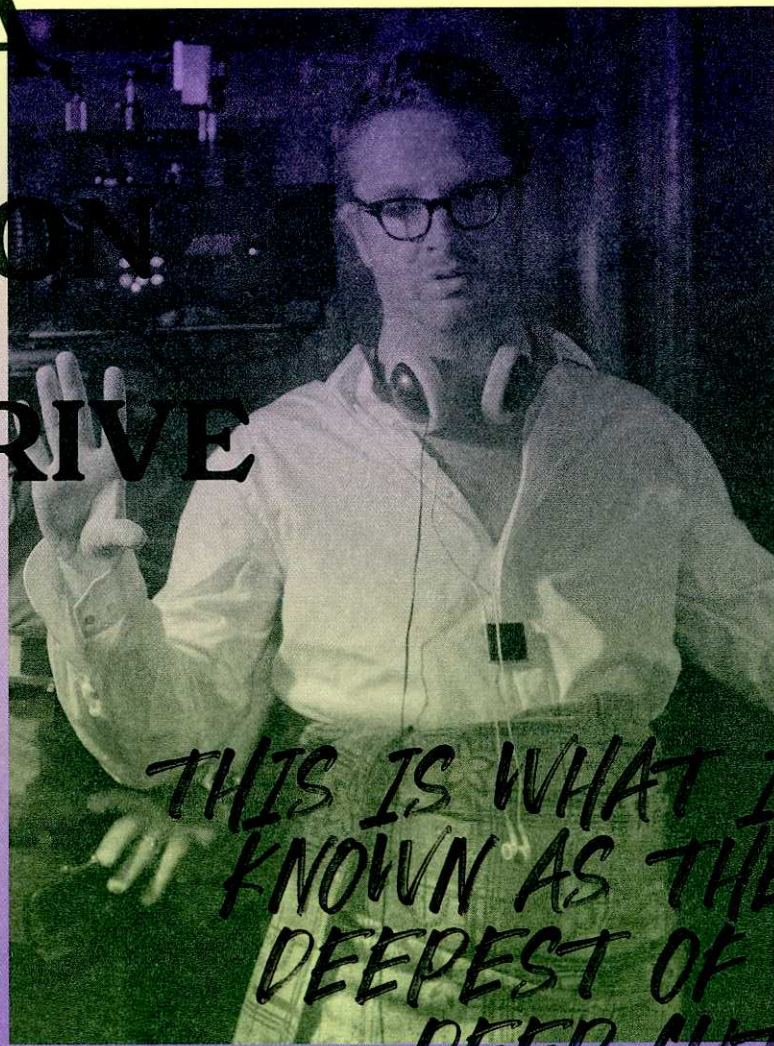
* Lisa Coulthard (2016) 'Acoustic Disgust: Sound, Affect, and Cinematic Violence' in Liz Greene and Danijela Kulezic-Wilson (ed.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design and Music in Screen Media* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 183-193.



DRIVEN BY CINEMA NICOLAS WINDING REFN, EXPLOITATION FILMS AND THE INFLUENCES ON DRIVE

BY TRAVIS CRAWFORD

Roughly 82 minutes into *Drive* – as much of an instant genre film classic as anything yet produced in the 2000s – there's a needle-drop to make jaws drop. Or at least the jaws that belong to any cineaste as enamoured with the most obscure corners of exploitation cinema as *Drive* director Nicolas Winding Refn. As Ryan Gosling's iconically unnamed part-time stunt driver/part-time getaway driver masks up to extract revenge on the gangsters who killed his garage boss (the mind boggles as to what actor that ghastly disguise was sculpted to impersonate – is Gosling doubling for Tor Johnson?!), the heretofore sleek synth score by Cliff Martinez gives way to the haunting vocals of Katyna Ranieri singing 'Oh My Love'. This is what is known as the deepest of deep cuts – a tip of the hat to Italian commercial cinema far more



THIS IS WHAT IS
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DEEP CUTS

THE FILM'S LACONIC, SIMMERING HERO IS MOST OBVIOUSLY CUT FROM THE SAME CINEMATIC CLOTH AS EASTWOOD'S



esoteric than any run-of-the-mill Morricone soundtrack crib.

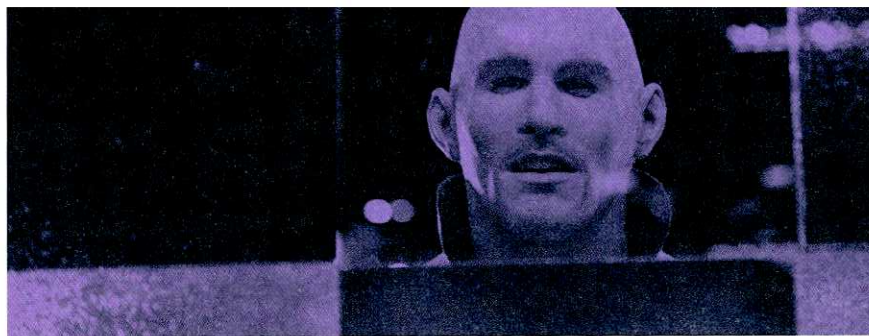
'Oh My Love' is the opening title theme to *Goodbye Uncle Tom* (1971), a positively jaw-dropping, brutal, and genuinely exploitive faux documentary on slavery in the American South during the antebellum era, directed by the duo of Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi, who had previously struck unlikely international cinema gold with *Mondo Cane* (1962). The atypically melodramatic inclusion of the song – composed by Ranieri's husband Riz Ortolani, whose soundtrack work includes the famous 'More' theme from *Mondo Cane* (again, sung by his wife) and the eternally traumatic score from *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980) – must have been just one more element of *Drive* that baffled the American multiplex wide-release audiences to whom the film was somewhat confusingly aimed (even causing one frustrated viewer to sue the distributor for misleading marketing). Generally speaking, films that win

the Best Director prize at Cannes don't particularly knock 'em dead next door to the latest comic book superhero tentpole. But 'Oh My Love', in its invocation of the ultimate in boundary-pushing Italian cinema that will be completely unknown to the vast majority of a general audience, is one of Refn's few direct homages to a world of exploitation filmmaking that holds an important place in his love of the medium, and his body of work – a passion that has become more apparent each year since *Drive* was released.

In the past decade, Refn has taken his enthusiasm for low-budget exploitation cinema (and his legendary poster and prints collections of related material) and unleashed it onto the world in the form of multiple restoration fundings and presentations, lavish coffee-table books on the subject, championing one of American independent grindhouse cinema's most idiosyncratic and obsessive auteurs, and creating a free website that's one of the greatest streaming platforms and research tools available today. But, again, Refn doesn't feel required to name-check these obscure curios in his own work as a director – 'Oh My Love' is more of an anomaly than a representative example – but it's fascinating to see how these influences nonetheless infect his films.

However, the most commonly cited references in *Drive* are actually *not* from exploitation films. The film's laconic, simmering hero is most obviously cut from the same cinematic cloth as Eastwood's 'Man With No Name', but also has antecedents in Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Samourai* (1967), Walter Hill's

The Driver (1978) and John Woo's *The Killer* (1989) – *Drive* also shares its tone of hybrid existentialism/fatalism and its aesthetic of nocturnal noir urban isolation with those films, and Gosling's character seems to like fetishistically chewing on toothpicks almost as much as multiple Chow Yun-fat characters in Woo films, although obviously that's a tough guy tradition that harks back to noir and westerns too. Relating to both filmic existentialism and fetishism, *Drive* also has an affinity with the lonely automotive wanderlust counterculture dramas of the 1970s 'New Hollywood', films like Monte Hellman's *Two Lane Blacktop* and Richard Sarafian's *Vanishing Point* (both from 1971), and James William Guercio's *Electra Glide in Blue* (1973). Tonally, *Drive* shares more rapport with those films than with the parallel 70s car chase subgenre of more redneck-aligned drive-in fare like John Hough's *Dirty Mary, Crazy Larry* (1974), Joseph Sargent's *White Lightning* (1973), Jonathan Kaplan's *White Line Fever* (1975) and Charles B Griffith's *Eat My Dust* (1976) – interestingly, H B Halicki's *Gone in 60 Seconds* (1974) would seem to be one of the few films that could arguably be considered to be part of both categorisations (Copenhagen native Refn famously does not drive and has no fondness for American car culture, and had to be chauffeured around LA by Gosling to ascertain a feel for the city). And *Drive*'s sequences of mayhem have been compared to certain notorious, crimson-coated forerunners. The motel bathroom bloodbath echoes De Palma's *Scarface* remake (1983); Gosling's choice of a clawhammer as a weapon of choice evokes Park Chan-wook's *Oldboy* (2003). The faucet rinsing of blood from a straight razor recalls Dario Argento's 1982 classic *Tenebrae* (while variations of that image have surely appeared in earlier *giallo* thrillers) and its placement back in a red-lined case housing similar bladed weapons is straight from Argento's debut *The Bird With Crystal Plumage* (1970). The car speeding in reverse down a freeway could



be viewed as a play on the 'wrong way' auto chase in William Friedkin's 1985 stunner *To Live and Die in LA* (one of several moments in Refn's film that brings the Friedkin favourite to mind, including its 80s aesthetic, synth score, use of the LA River's concrete culverts, and even its main title font, although this was apparently a steal from Paul Brickman's 1983 comedy *Risky Business*). And Refn actually consulted with Gaspar Noe about the latter's *Irreversible* (2002), picking his brain (ahem...) about the cranium-crushing fire extinguisher sequence of the Noe film, in preparation for *Drive*'s similarly gruesome lift-located head-stomping.

Among European directors, Refn has actually been compared to Noe and Refn's countryman Lars von Trier (with whom he has quite publicly – and occasionally amusingly – feuded in recent years, despite his father, filmmaker Anders Refn, working as von Trier's editor and/or assistant director on many films). All three directors are provocateurs who employ startling violence to gasp-inducing effect, and they also tend to fuse low-brow exploitation and genre film tropes with high-brow arthouse aspirations to simultaneously seduce and offend film fest crowds. But there's a key difference. Noe and von Trier adopt weighty auteurist themes of spirituality and crises of faith, the boundaries of intimacy and trust, the uncertain transience and impermanence

of human existence, 'God's silence' et al, and they filter these dense subjects through an incendiary, audience-goading sensibility – lofty arthouse content in visceral grindhouse form. (See also Michael Haneke's moralist treatises on media violence that simultaneously, sado-masochistically revel in the very same shocking material they purport to condemn.) Refn's films – particularly those that followed more straightforward work like the *Pusher* trilogy (1996-2005), *Bleeder* (1999), and *Bronson* (2008) – are another affair entirely. Refn takes pure pulp material, strips it of everything but the most minimalist narrative flow and archetypal characterisation, and then refracts it through a dreamlike, contemplative prism that makes the final result chilly and meditative, yet bruising and unsettling. *Valhalla Rising* (2009) is a Viking saga, *Drive* and the Gosling-led 2013 film *Only God Forgives* (arguably his masterpiece to date) are bloody gangster action movies, *The Neon Demon* (2016) is Refn's first 'horror' movie (although his 2003 Lynchian thriller *Fear X* came close). But Refn is increasingly unconcerned with obeying the rules of genre as he pursues his own personal cinematic concerns, and this has admittedly alienated some of his audience, with *The Neon Demon* and *Only God Forgives* receiving infamously divided and often hostile festival receptions, and confounding even some of the director's admirers who loved *Drive*. Refn's affection for genre and exploitation films has seen his work marketed to wider audiences, but his sensibilities are unlikely to see him joining the Marvel Cinematic Universe anytime soon. If anything, Refn's work more closely resembles the films of Belgian directing duo (and couple) Hélène Cattet and Bruno Forzani, whose Italian genre film homages – *Amer* (2009), *The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears* (2013), and *Let The Corpses Tan* (2017) – take their visual inspirations and music cues, and then shatter and reconstruct the fragments via a cubist kaleidoscope.

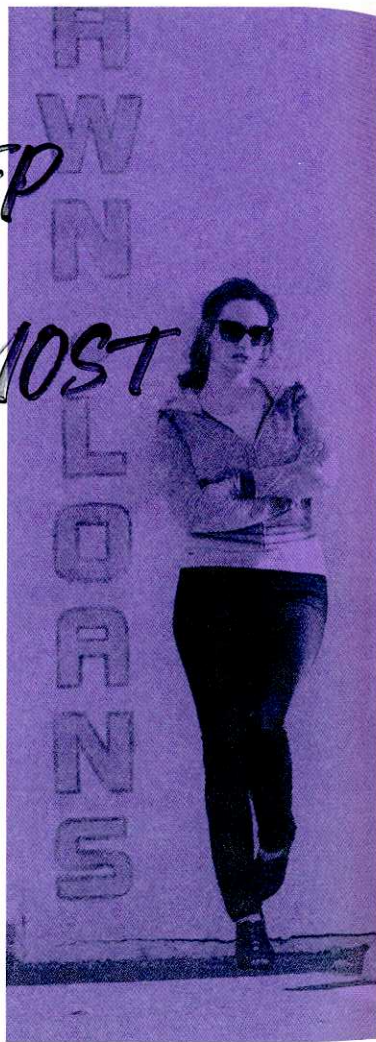


LOFTY ARTHOUSE CONTENT IN VISCERAL GRINDHOUSE FORM

Refn's own film viewing tastes are even more defiantly idiosyncratic than his directing work. In 2015, the filmmaker began a partnership with UK boutique publishing house FAB Press, resulting in *The Art of Seeing*, a lavish, luxurious tome (a power-lifting background may be required to carry it) devoted to Refn's archive of vintage American exploitation film posters, with accompanying explanatory text by UK film writer Alan Jones. A remarkable testimony to Refn's obsessive fascination with the grindhouse world of a bygone era, it was followed by Refn and FAB Press's 2020 coffee-table book reprinting of Jimmy McDonough's biography of director Andy Milligan, *The Ghastly One* (originally published in 2003, and now made available in a greatly expanded, revised form). McDonough's book is not only one of the best biographies ever written about a filmmaker, but it's also that rare text that is essential in helping a viewer truly understand and appreciate the work of an artist whose output can only be described as, well, 'challenging'. Milligan was a Staten Island director whose micro-budgeted output (from 1965 to 1988) can only be described as the lowest of the low-grade 42nd Street fare,

IT'S THE DEEP CUTS THAT MATTER MOST

with respect to production value, and with their rudimentary technical qualities responsible for the scorn heaped upon them even by gutter cinema enthusiasts. (Stephen King labelled one of Milligan's films 'the work of morons with cameras', while *Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film* guru Michael Weldon opined, 'If you're a Milligan fan, there's no hope for you.') But his work displays a feverish intensity and compulsive fixation on twisted family dynamics, and the films can count Refn as one of their growing admirers – the BFI release of Milligan's UK-shot drama *Nightbirds* (1970) arrived with Milligan's input (and the use of his own personal print of the film), and this is also part of the US Blu-ray label Severin Films' new 14-film boxed set on Milligan's work.



Two unfinished Milligan films, the NYC avant-garde oddity *Compass Rose* (1967) and the frankly dumbfounding Southern plantation melodrama *House of Seven Belles* (1979), have been restored and presented on the BYNWR.com website. Surely one of the most ambitious and generous cineaste endeavours undertaken by a filmmaker and film fanatic, the site is an entirely free platform for streaming a large number of generally pristine-looking American exploitation and genre features from the 1950s through the 80s, along with a vast collection of related interviews, essays, and photo galleries (Refn's site is partially edited by McDonough, and recently held a contest wherein contributors could submit their recommended denouements for the uncompleted *Seven Belles*).

The site offers viewing of such established grindhouse perennials as Joseph Pietro's *Shanty Tramp* (1967), Stephen C Apostolof's *Orgy of the Dead* (1965) and Bob Clark's 1967 debut *She-Man*, but – once again with Refn – it's the deep cuts that matter most, as one can also stream Bert Williams' *Nest of the Cuckoo Birds* (1965), thought lost for decades, and Joseph L Anderson's genuine Appalachian masterpiece *Spring Night, Summer Night* (1967). But perhaps Refn's most welcome contribution to the preservation of offbeat independent cinema is the site's presentation of the fire-and-brimstone evangelical films of Ron Ormond, a Southern exploitation moviemaker in the grand carny tradition, who became born again following a 1968 near-death experience, and worked with Mississippi minister Estus Pirkle to create a series of apocalyptic Christian propaganda scare films that have never been equalled. BYNWR.com offers several of these films such as *If Footmen Tire You, What Will Horses Do?* (1971), *The Burning Hell* (1974), *The Grim Reaper* (1976), and *The Believer's Heaven* (1977), providing a look into a

compelling chapter of American regional filmmaking that's truly revelatory. Refn and McDonough are currently collaborating on a biography of Ormond as well.

Refn has been involved with the presentation of genre cinema in other ways over the past decade – he lent his name and support to the European restorations and rereleases of George A Romero's seminal *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and Mario Bava's hugely influential *Planet of the Vampires* (1965) – but one of his more entertaining, low-profile contributions to this world is his appearance on the DVD commentary tracks for two hardcore porn features, *The Violation of Claudia* (1977) and *Hot Honey* (1978), pseudonymously directed by William Lustig (under the name Billy Bagg) at the onset of his career. Lustig and Refn share a frequently hilarious rapport in their commentaries, and the two are obviously friends who have much in common – Lustig began his career in the 1970s exploitation film environment that Refn adores, before Lustig went on to preserve and release restorations of these films through his own video label, Blue Underground (which, not coincidentally, released *Goodbye Uncle Tom* on DVD). It remains to be seen if it comes to fruition, but Refn's next project as a director is scheduled to be a remake of Lustig's own 1988 horror film *Maniac Cop*. Given Refn's own distinctive spin on the fusion of grindhouse with arthouse, one can safely suspect that this will definitely *not* be a standard issue 80s horror reboot.

Travis Crawford has written on cinema for such publications as *Film Comment*, *Filmmaker* and *The Calvert Journal*, and books including *1,001 Movies You Must See Before You Die* and *100 European Horror Films*. He was formerly the Associate Program Director of the Philadelphia Film Festival.



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